

IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE



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Preface

Of late some critical books and articles on Shashi Deshpande came out. But they are mostly synoptic in their approach or riddled with the fashionable jargon of feminist criticism. Hardly anybody paid any critical need to the study of "image of woman" in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Thus a study of Image of woman in the novels of Shashi Deshpande has been hitherto unexplored and neglected by the scholar and critic. So the need of the hour is to make a critical study of this aspect of her novels which I have endeavoured to do in my thesis.

With a feeling of profound respect and gratitude, I profusely thank my supervisor Dr. Madhusudan Prasad, (Reader in English, Allahabad University, Allahabad) for his considerable help and encouragement. It has been my great privilege and pleasure to be working under his supervision. I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude to

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Chapter - 1

INTRODUCTION

Image of Woman in Post-Independence Indian English Novels

The image of woman is undoubtedly integral to the study of literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian English literature as well. Ever since the dawn of civilization, woman has been a myth, a metaphor, a symbol, a deity or a devil. Altering the context and the special meaning involved, what Shakespeare said of Cleopatra is indeed true of the image of woman in general:

Age cannot wither

Nor custom stale her infinite variety.¹

But what is the real image of woman? What is her real character? What is her real nature? What is her real entity? Has she any identity of her own? Several such questions have to be faced and answered. As a matter of fact, there are several images of woman painted by

1. William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Complete Works*, New Delhi : Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd , 1980, p. 1156.

novelists in Indian English novels — woman as a wife, a submissive creature, a fierce rebel, a mother, a sister, a beloved, a friend, a mistress, a floozy etc.

When we critically scrutinize the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, two novels stand out of the entire corpus of his writings, presenting interesting images of unconventional women, which indicate the growth and changes of the status *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1955) and *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), also called *Gauri*.

In *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, Mulk Raj Anand has portrayed the image of a non-professional floozy Ganga Dasi. Ganga Dasi is an image of absolute promiscuity. Sex is a wild adventure for her and she uses it as a powerful tool to achieve her twin goal of pleasure and power. Her letter to Vicky written after leaving him, makes it clear that security, comfort and money are at the source of all her love making. By exerting the light of her green eyes in an ogling manner, she could win any argument. She is proud of this power and expresses her confidence to win over Popatlal Shah, the new Diwan. She holds Vicky, the 'hopelessly ill-adjusted personality' in her spell and Vicky is also no less promiscuous than Ganga Dasi. But very often it is her tantalising nature that leads him to other women. His affair with other women directs him back with aggravated desire to the resourceful Ganga Dasi. He finds love and pleasure in totality, in fullness only in Ganga Dasi. But for her, any man is good enough if he

can shower wealth on her. His knowledge of her weakness does not rectify his weakness for her. The incessant orders from the state do not manage to banish her either from the state or from the heart. With her 'X-ray eyes' she could enter the very narrow of men and spot the fundamental weakness in them. Returning from some other man's bed chamber she takes the lead in accusing Vicky of insincerity in order to forestall his accusation. She wishes to possess all men but never to be possessed by any.

Mulk Raj Anand portrays the image of a bold character in his well-known novel *The Old Woman and the Cow*. The novel opens with the elaborate description of Gauri's marriage ceremony. After marriage ceremony Panchi, the robust youngman, gallops to Piplam Kalam with all enthusiasm to 'own' Gauri, he muses over 'the prospect of the prize of a girl — a girl whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the work on the land....² He hopes that Gauri would be obedient, he thinks, is the most essential quality of a wife. After marriage Panchi is ever vigilant to find fault with her. When the whole village is affected by drought, he believes that Gauri, with her inauspicious stars, has brought it to his door alone. He blames her for helping Hoor Banu to take the drunken Chacha home and thus she becomes an indirect

². Mulk Raj Anand, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Bombay : Kutub- Popular, 1960, p. 223

cause. Panchi feels that Gauri is responsible for all his misery and misfortune. He quarrels with her. And finally he feels that there is no emotional harmony between them. Mutual trust and equality, the essential requisites of married life, are totally absent in their household. But Gauri's struggle is more fundamental. All that she aspires for is "to be accepted as an individual and not for the equal rights of man-woman relationship."³ In spite of her dogged devotion to him, he repudiates her at the revelation of her pregnancy and this drives her despair. Gauri's 'home-coming' offers her no solace. "Home is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in," says Robert Frost (Death of a Hired Man). But, the home where she was born and brought up, where her goddess dwelled and thereby where she thought she belonged, fails to shelter her. When Gauri's efforts to disentangle Panchi from the grip of the conventional society prove futile, she realises that she cannot change the society or Panchi from within and so she comes out of the cocoon of orthodoxy. She decides to live for her promising, yet-to-be born child. For this purpose, she joined the hospital at Hoshiarpur under the guidance of Colonel Mahindra. She gains more self-confidence and self-respect and her protest gains greater vigour. She chooses the better path of serving the millions of sick people than pamper a grumpy husband all her life.

³. D. Riemenschneider, *An Ideal of Man in Anand's novel*, New Delhi : Publication Kutub Popular, 1967, p. 20.

When Panchi hits her, she gives final warning, "... if you strike me again, I'll hit you back"⁴ This is the image of an unconventional bold woman who revolts not only against her husband but also against the society.

Thus both in *Private Life of an Indian Prince* and *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Anand Portrays two different unconventional images of women — woman as a rebel and woman as a self-respect and self-confidence. In rest of his novels Anand has generally portrayed the conventional images of submissive, suffering, or exploited women.

R.K. Narayan Portrays a wide range of feminine characters — from conventional to rebellious. The conventional women dominate and are shown as supporters of the institutions of family. But he has identified the turmoil in the minds of women. When we view the novels of R.K. Narayan, three novels stand out of the entire corpus of his writings, presenting interesting images of unconventional women, which indicate the growth and changes the status of women in India. Chronologically speaking, these novels are *The Dark Room* (1938), *The Guide* (1958), and *The Painter of Signs* (1976). In *The Dark Room*, Narayan paints for the first time the image of a woman who makes bold to revolt against her own promiscuous husband. Savitri is a chief protagonist in the novel who revolts in her own way against

⁴. Mulk Raj Anand, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Op. Cit., p. 64.

Ramani who carries on with his colleague Shanta. Fed up with the promiscuous nature of her husband who occasionally stage back in his office and sleeps with her colleague and also sick of the marriage treatment. She gets at the hands of her husband at home. She one day walks out on her husband and children with a view to committing suicide. She jumps into a river to commit suicide but unfortunately she is rescued. Not being economically independent she did not have any option but to return to the same home and husband. Her rebellion against her husband is meek and weak. This is the first image of bold married woman endeavours, though in vain, to who revolt against her promiscuous husband.

After a long gap Narayan makes once again an attempt to present the image of a bold rebellious woman in *The Guide*. Rosie married to an archaeologist called Marco, suffers marital incompatibility. When they visit Malgudi, they meet Raju the railway guide. Being a shrewd person, Raju immediately notices the incompatibility between Rosie and Marco who is devoted only to the study of cave paintings. Marco is so much involved in his archaeological research that he pays little heed to his wife Rosie. Raju slowly and gradually alienates Rosie from Marco and gives her inborn passion for dancing a free play. Rosie develops into a renowned dancer. She lives with Raju and loves him, but she does not hesitate at all to get Raju imprisoned on the charge of the forgery. This is certainly the image of a bold economically independent woman.

The portrayal of the image of woman is R.K. Narayan's novel reaches its Zenith in *The Painter of Signs*. This novel narrates the infatuation of 'Raman' a middle aged bachelor with an extremely independent girl, Daisy. Daisy is depicted as a liberated woman, economically independent and working for the social cause of family planning programmes. Raman is a sentimental person, easily attached to anybody and has very strong notions about sex. He regards sex as an extremely important part of life and get preference just the opposite of what he actually believes. He portrays himself as a rationalist, who does not bother much, about either money or sex in life. This novel deals with the conflict in his personality.

In this novel, Narayan treats the fundamental man-woman relationship in the perspective of radical feminism and presents a narrative that concentrate on man's primordial urge for sex and love vis-a-visa radical concept, which induces women to come out of her traditional image and lead an independent life rejecting the institution of marriage altogether, using men for biological necessity and treating them as used condoms. This is a unique kind of image of a liberated Indian woman painted by R.K. Narayan.

Raja Rao belongs to the first generation of novelists. He is a third major Indian novelist in English. He upholds the mythic pattern in his novels. His is that of a Vedantian and he observes "*to be mothers were women created.*" His concept of womanhood

precludes individualism. In his first famous novel *Kanthapura* (1938), we notice two different images of women characters — one conventional and the other unconventional, bold. The narrator, 'grandmother' in *Kanthapura* represents the image of an ideal old Indian Woman, while Ratna represents an unconventional image of a young Indian woman. Being a widow, she does not follow the rituals of widowhood. She wears colourful sarees, bangles and uses *Kumkum* upon her forehead. When Moorthy goes to jail, she organises the Freedom Struggle Movement in his absence. Ratna here represents the image of an unconventional bold Indian woman of modern Indian society.

In his Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *The Serpent and The Rope* (1964), Raja Rao presents Madeleine as both conventional and unconventional woman. Madeleine, Rama's wife, is a finally realized creation; and her drifting away from Rama under the circumstances, inevitable. Marrying the Hindu Brahmin, The French Catholic become an ardent Buddhist : how is one to explain this amazing alchemy? Madeleine experiences the glory and the agony of love and marriage and motherhood — and races beyond them through aspiration and asceticism to sainthood, or at least near - sainthood : yet she remains human and lovable and understanding till the last. The other character in the novel is Savitri - an emancipated girl who smokes and talks freely. The attraction between Rama and Savitri is obviously mutual, each has a catalytic effect upon the other, each

grows upon the other's consciousness, - yet the impression is conveyed that it is a spiritual, rather than a physical, affinity that draws them together. There is a mystic or 'symbolic' marriage, too, but presently she goes back to India to marry her jagirdar (whom she does not love) and Rama returns to Madeleine at Aix-en-Provence. There is a third woman, too, in Rama's life : it is Sham Sunder's wife, Lakshmi, with whom Rama has a brief liaison at Bombay towards the fag end of his second visit to India. But he quickly disentangles himself from this adulterous relationship and takes the plane back to Aix and Madeleine. He leaves Lakshmi. And Madeleine leaves Rama later on; but Savitri neither could have him nor leave him. Thus, this novel presents both conventional and unconventional images of women.

Bhabani Bhattacharya assigns women a new role, that of a bridge between the East and the West, the old and the new . According to him, women are full of exuberance and vitality but once the woman tries to come out into the world, she is victimized; only the strongest survive. Bhattacharya has produced six novels such as *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Golden Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966), *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). His women characters represent typical Indian Struggling women. They fight against poverty, injustice and social ills and evils. His women characters such as Kajoli, Mohini, Lekha, Lakshmi, Meera and Sumita stand out in our memory.

Manohar Malgonkar's world of fiction is male dominated in which women seem to be a little more than instruments of masculine pleasure. Malgonkar's novels are neatly constructed and entertainingly told which, however, present a rather limited view of life and human nature seen through the eyes of hard-boiled man of the world for whom there is little to admire and respect in human nature — a man for whom love is mostly equated with sex and flesh. His novels are — *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Prince* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and *The Devil's Wind* (1972).

Another novelist of note is Balchandra Rajan. He describes realism and fantasy in his novels. His two novels are *The Dark Dancer* (1959) and *Too Long in the West* (1961). Rajan paints the character of Kamala who faces the problem of East-West encounter in terms of her quest for identity in *The Dark Dancer*. In *Too Long in the West* the character of Nalini stands out who returns from an American University to face the problem of choosing a suitable husband.

Arun Joshi is a very eminent Indian - English novelist whose "recurrent theme is alienation in its different aspects, and his heroes are intensely self-centered persons prove to self pity and escapism. In spite of their weaknesses they are, however, genuine seekers who

strive to grape towards a purpose in life and self-fulfilment."⁵ In his five novels such as *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), the Sahitya Akademy winning novel *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) and *The City and the River* (1990), Joshi describes his heroes as genuine seekers after self-fulfilment. In his novels, the images of two women characters such as Mrs. Billy Biswas and Bilasia are quite important. As a matter of fact the image of Mrs. Billy Biswas stands out. She represents the typical image of a tenacious Indian wife who does not want to lose her husband in spite of his being tribalized.

Chaman Nahal is a novelist of painful odysseys presented in different contexts. His novels such as *My True Faces* (1973), *Azadi* (1975), *Into Other Dawn* (1977), *The English Queens* (1979) and *The Crown and the Lion Cloth* (1981) are noteworthy.

A major Indian English Woman novelist is Kamala Markandaya. Born in India Markandaya is married to a British novelist, Taylor, and settled in England. She has written quite a few distinguished novels such as *Nector in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1957), *A Silence of Desire* (1961), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Caffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honey Comb* (1977),

⁵. M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literatre*, Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1999, p. 229.

and *Shalimar* (1982) or *Pleasure City* (1982). She portrays the image of Rukmini as conventional mother, Mira's struggling between tradition and modernity and Nina as a bold and unconventional woman.

Like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala is another prominent Indian English Woman novelist. She has so far penned thirteen novels such as *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962); to the second belong *Esmond in India* (1958), *A Backward Place* (1965), *An Eexperience of India* (1971), *A New Dominion* (1973), *Heat and Dust* (1975). Booker Prize Winning novel, *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983), *Three Continents* (1987), *Poet and Dancer* (1993) and *Shards of Memory* (1995). She has ironically portrayed the conventional image of Indian woman in her novels. In this regard M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan rightly remark that "Unfortunately, India is often represented through stereotypes : its most important features seem to be the overwhelming sexual attraction of the men, and the Charisma of the guru (of either sex), who is often a fraud."⁶

Anita Desai is one of the major Indina English woman novelists. Her fictional writing mainly depict the interior landscape of the mind

⁶. M.K. Nayak and Shyamala A. Narayan, *Indian English Literature 1980-2000 : A Critical Survey*, Delhi : Pencraft International, 2001, P. 78.

rather than political and social realities. Writing for her, "is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things."⁷ Desai's novels, according to her, deal with what Ortega Y.Gasset called, "the terror of facing, single - handed, the ferocious assaults of existence."⁸ M.K. Naik rightly says :

Desai's protagonists are persons 'for whom aloneness alone' is 'the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring.' They are mostly women, who, though they have reached different stages in life (from school girl to grandmother), are all fragile introverts, trapped in their own skins."⁹

Her novels are such as *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire On the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999). Since Desai is obviously a feminist novelist, most her novels are female oriented. She has presented interesting images of women in her novels. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* has been delineated as a psychic case murdering

7. Anita Desai, "Interview with Yashodhara Dalmia", *The Times of India*, 29 April, 1979.

8. Ibid., p.7.

9. M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature*, Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1999, p. 241.

her own husband for her own fulfilment of a sort. In *Voices in The City* the character of Monisha and Amla stand out. These two women characters boldly rebel against the hackneyed conventions of middle class life and yearn for self-expression and self-fulfilment in their own way and on their own terms, although both come to grief — Monisha commit suicide and Amla gets heart broken when her love is rejected. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* has been initially painted as a rebellious wife who runs away along with her children even in the state of pregnancy from her husband but ends up as making a compromise with her husband. Desai presents the bold images of two women in *Fire on the Mountain*. The images of Nanda Kaul as neglected widow, Ila Das as a social worker definitely stand out. Desai once again presents a remarkable image of woman in *Clear Light of Day*. The image of Bim in the novel is quite memorable. According to M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan, "Bim is a completely new heroine is Anita Desai's fiction, heart-headed and facing life's challenges bravely."¹⁰

Nayantara Sahgal is regarded primarily as an exponent of the political novels in Indian English fiction. She has written quite a few novels such as *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A*

¹⁰. M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan, *Indian English Literature, 1980-2000 : A Critical Survey*, Ibid : p. 87.

situation in New Delhi (1977), *Rich like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988). In her novels, Sahgal lays emphasis on freedom and a new definition of "the virtuous woman." She emphasizes the need of awareness for women. In most of her novels, the heroines are aware of the injustice done to them in their marriages and they walk out of their homes. Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* and Simrati in *The Day of Shadow* leave their homes. The conventional woman suffers quietly; the "New Woman" is determined to live with self-respect. Her virtue is courage and a willingness to risk the unknown. If some women meet new partners after leaving their homes, Devi in *A Situation in New Delhi* and Sonali in *Rich Like Us* do without men.

Most of her characters feel that man is still not fit to be an equal partner. Till such partners are ready such women will languish in loneliness. Nayantara Sahgal portrays women mostly from the upper strata and often a political backdrop is created.¹¹

Veena Paintal writes "about the educated upper middle class women stripping away the facade of chiffon sarees and cocktail parties — to delve into their lives and personalities and their particular

¹¹. Yashoda Bhat and Yamuna Raj Rao, *The Image of Woman in Indian Literature*, Delhi : B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1993, p. 37-38.

struggles."¹² Her novels such as *Roshini or Serenity in Storm* (1967), *Link in the Broken Chain* (1967), *An Autumn Leaf* (1976), *Spring Returns* (1977) and *Midnight Woman* (1979) deals with the image of woman in different ways. In the novels of Paintal, the various images of woman include woman as a liberated being as well as woman as prostitute living in the present day Indian Society.

In the last three decades, Raji Narasimhan gradually emerged as a powerful novelist who boldly espouses the cause of the new liberated woman in the contemporary Indian society. So far she has penned five noteworthy novels : *The Heat of Standing is You Cannot Fly* (1973), *Forever Free* (1979), *Drifting to a Dawn* (1983), *The Sky Changes* (1991) and *Attonement* (2000). In all her five novels, Narasimhan has attempted to portray variously the image of the new liberated woman who wants to live on in the present-day Indian Society on her own terms. In this respect, Atma Ram remarks that "her novels are marked by selective social realism and depiction of new woman."¹³

¹². Vinay Pal Kripal, *Indian English Novelists* (Ed.) Madhusudan Prasad, New Delhi : Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1982, p. 202.

¹³. Atma Ram, "Raji Narasimhan," *Indian English Novelists, An Anthology of Critical Essays*: Edited by Madhusudan Prasad · New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, p. 186.

Bharati Mukherjee an eminent immigrant novelist, now settled in the United States, has written five novels, they are, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), and *Leave it to Me* (1997). Mukherjee portrays the image of Indian woman in some of her novels. Tara is painted as a tigress, Dimple Dasgupta as an unusually courageous person murders her husband to find peace and relief in the first two novels respectively. In *Jasmine* Mukherjee once again paints the image of a Punjabi girl modernized as Jasmine who is raped repeatedly in her effort to enter America illegally. The image of Jasmine is that of a fighting woman who struggles ahead despite several odds. In *Leave it to Me*, Mukherjee paints the image of a twenty three year old girl Debby Di Mertino as Mahishasuramardini in the American milieu.

Uma Vasudev attracted attention with her first novel titled *The Song of Anasuya* (1978) which seeks with "Sex-thought, sex-talk, and sex-act."¹⁴ Uma Vasudev has also come out with her second novel titled *Shreya of Sonagarh* (1993) which deals with the protagonist's rise to political power. Shreya is a selfish middle class girl married into a princely family. In her two novels Uma Vasudev presents a new unconventional image of woman, living in India today. Shouri Daniels is another interesting novelist. As in Uma Vasudev's; *The song of*

¹⁴ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi : Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1995, p. 760.

Anasuya, Mira, the protagonist in Daniels's *The Salt Doll* (1979) also uses uninhibited language. Daniels, like Vasudev, has painted the image of a liberated woman.

Shiv K. Kumar's works such as *The Bone's prayer* (1979), *Nude Before God* (1983), *River with Three Banks : The Partition of India : The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1994), and *Infatuation* (2000) merit some attention. Kumar has etched two notable images of woman. Sheila as a promiscuous prostitute in *The Bone's Prayer* and Prema as a typical Indian wife in *Infatuation*. These two images attract some attention.

Mrinalini Sarabhai's novel, *This Alone is True* (1977), describes the difficulties that have to be faced by a girl of good family who desires to make dancing her career. The endemic prejudice against the profession ("the profession of harlots!") is reinforced by opposition from the husband and his family. Parvati, the heroine, finally decides to follow her 'inner voice', which here means rejection of her lower chetan and his possessive mother, and the sacrifice of the joys and fulfilments of a happy marriage.

Rama Mehta's first Sahitya Akademy winning novel, *Inside the Haveli* (1977) deals with the tradition bound culture for women. The heroine Geeta, moves from the large freedom of Bombay, where she had received her education, to the sheltered prison like security of an aristocratic 'haveli' in Udaipur. Her husband teaches at the local

University, but is not unconscious of the attraction of Delhi. Within the Haveli, all is tradition-bound, and while this means strength and security, it also means isolation and stagnation. But things change even at the Haveli, for although Geeta gradually gets used to its life changing herself in the process, she also subtly changes her immediate environment and the people concerned. In the end, she becomes the mistress of the Haveli, feeling a pride in what is best in the family tradition and trying in other respects to make the Haveli community of relatives and dependents move with the times, making sure of each forward step. Inside the Haveli a sensitive piece of realistic novel. The novel is structured into three parts — The balance between repose and movement is well sustained, there is romance but no cheap sex, there is tension but no violence, and there is a feeling for the values and the varieties. Thus, the image of an Indian woman who silently breaks the tradition bound culture of the Haveli in her novel deserves critical attention.

Thus we notice that the various Indian English novelists have painted the image of woman variously in their novels. But the contribution of Shashi Deshpande is unique as she has handled the image of woman in her novels very remarkably, voicing the agonizing plight and predicament of millions of married Indian women.

Chapter - 2

The Dark Holds No Terrors

Most of the Indian novels, that deal with women's issues, offer a superficial, surfacial or peripheral treatment of the subject or end up glorifying the stereotypical virtues of Indian woman like patience, devotion, loyalty and object acceptance of whatever is meted out to her. Shashi Deshpande emerged on the contemporary scenario of Indian English fiction as a remarkably powerful stupendous woman novelist envincing considerable promise in depicting the ethos of the middle-class life in contemporary India with astonishing originality, ingenuity and fidelity. In all her novels, there is undoubtedly, the boldness and uninhibitedness noticeable in the poetry of modern women poets like Kamala Das.

The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), which is the maiden novel of Shashi Deshpande, is a totally different work in the domain of Indian English fiction in the sense that it explodes the myth of man's arrogant superiority and the myth of women's being a silent sacrificial goat or an unquestioning paragon of all virtues. As the novel opens, Sarita (Saru), the protagonist is already in the grip of familiar irritation, exasperation owing to an unbridgeable gulf between herself and her husband, called Manohar (Manu), a teacher by profession. Sarita comes back to her home overtly to look after her

widower father, but covertly to escape from the nightmarish brutality inflicted on her every night by her sadist husband. Living in her father's home, she reflects on the events of her life and the novel gets unfolded through her memories of the past, which continue to be compared and contrasted with her present stay. She remembers her childhood, her domineering mother, Kamalatai, her marriage to the versatile looking Manohar, the silent suffering which follows and her two children Abhijit and Renuka.

When Saru reaches her father's home after fifteen years leaving her husband, her father welcomes her, "like unwilling host an unwelcome guest". She thinks that her problems had started right from her childhood. They became quite serious after her younger brother Dhruva's death, which is referred to as A.D. (After Dhruva). His death overshadows all after memories of her life as if that was the point of her fall. She is treated badly by her parents as she is regarded as the main person responsible for the death of Dhruva. She remembers, how she was treated second to Dhruva. She recalls her dialogue with her mother :

Don't go out in the sun. You will get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He is different. He is a boy.¹

Saru remembers that it was only once a year at the time of Puja that she was, "more important than Dhruva". Otherwise, "it was he who dominated her everywhere. There was always a puja on his birthday, but none on her birthday. Even after the death of Dhruva, her birthday was not celebrated. She also remembers that after Dhruva's death, there were no more celebrations. Her own birthday was passed over in silence, both at home and at school. It was only on her fifteenth birthday that she got a gold ear-ring from her mother as her birthday present. She was not loved and liked by her parents in the early ages of her life. She was blamed of Dhruva's death by them. Her mother continuously accused her of Dhruva's death and cursed her saying: why did not you die? Why are you alive and when he is dead?"² This leaves unpleasant effect on Saru. She thinks that she is a person without any special qualities or achievements long before she left her mother's home. "She remembers : I just did not exist for her. I died

¹. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, New Delhi : Penguin, 1990, p. 45.

². Ibid, pp. 29-30

long before I left home" (27). K.M. Pandey aptly remarks that, "In fact, male oriented societies structure females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender."³ Again he remarks that, "in the novel Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship, but exist between a female-female relationship as well."⁴ Saru remembers that when she wanted to study in medical college, her mother had been against her studies. Though unsuccessful, her mother tried her best to persuade her husband not to send Saru to medical college:

You don't belong to that (moneyed) class.

And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding.... Let her go for a B.Sc.... you can get her in two years and our responsibility will be over.⁵

This reflects that girls are seen as belonging to a different class altogether and their socialization stresses their future roles as wives. Veena Das remarks that :

Daughters are comparable to something kept in trust for another (amanut). You have to care for them, love them,

³. K.M Pandey, "Tearing the Veil", *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi. Creative Books, 1998, p. 52.

⁴. Ibid, p. 52.

⁵. Ibid : pp.130-131.

and you will be held responsible for them, but you are destined to lose them. Once a daughter is properly married to her own house, it is like a debt that has been paid.⁶

Thus a girl has to adjust herself twice : first in her father's house, and then in her father's-in-laws house. Goffman terms these as the "Primary adjustment" and the "secondary adjustment."⁷ These adjustments, especially the latter, put different kinds of bondage or "role playing" on the girl.

As the novel proceeds we find that Saru succeeds in persuading her father to send her to the medical college. She was a sincere student to whom "college meant lectures in the morning, practicals in the afternoon, exams every six months and medical college at the end of two years" (50). But as Fate would have it, she encounters Manohar and falls in love with him. Manohar was "one of the known names" (43) in the college for his cultural activities. "He was not a good student, academically I mean; he was also the Secretary of the literary Association, actively associated with the Debating Union and the life and soul of the Dramatic Society. And in addition to all this, a budding writer, a poet of promise, with some poems already published in

⁶. Veena Das, *Reflections on the Social Construction of Adulthood, Identity and Adulthood*, Delhi : edited by Sudhir Kakkar, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 93.

⁷. Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, New Delhi : Penguin Books, 1968, p. 52.

magazines"⁸ So she decides to marry him. But in the mean time she remembers her family, parents and brother Dhruva. The behaviour of her parents were not well. They gave her much pain in her childhood and were not interested in her joining Medical College. It was Boozie, the Pygmalion, who co-operated and shaped her career. He was her 'fairy godfather', who helped to achieve such a success to Saru therefore, she could hold the position and status as a famous doctor. After joining Medical College when she began to study Anatomy and Physiology in her first year of medicine, then she was suddenly released from a prison of fears and shames given by her parents in her homely life. She started to live a happy life with her friends in her college campus. In the mean time, the show of Manohar was to start. Her friend Smita came to her and prepared her to go to watch that show. That was Manu's climax and he had been a man, who was to take the literary world by storm, the man on the brink of doing so. When does she come to her room after watching Manohar's show, she peels off her coat unwound her sari, and lies down on the bed in her peticoat brooding:

Manohar, 'I said the name to myself. Then again, 'Manu'.

And through my left nipple which was pressed against the bed, I could feel the beating of my heart, strong and regular."⁹

⁸. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, op. cit. pp. 43-44.

⁹. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Op. Cit., pp. 65.

Her parents were against love marriage. She tries to motivate the mind and heart of her parents for marriage with Manohar, but they ignored, so she did a love marriage. She was quite happy to find such a versatile genius as her husband because "her age-old feminine dream of a superior conquering male" (47) has been fulfilled.

In the course of time Saru became a famous doctor and Manohar turned out to be simply a lecturer in a third rate college. This made her socially and economically his superior. People respect her as a famous doctor. She earns name and fame. But her social status and respect of people was not liked by her husband because he was ignored by them before his wife. Slowly an affected indifference started gleaming through his tone because there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for Sarita only for Sarita, and not for Manohar. There was nothing for Manohar. He was almost totally ignored by people. It was not noticed seriously by her that he minds it. But she remembers one thing how he said, "I am sick of this place. Let us go out of here soon." She remembers she found herself shrinking from his love making. It was because she was tired, always too tired after her long day at the hospital. He was the same. Still so eager to love her, so disappointed, why she refused him, that she rarely had the heart to do so. She is now a professional doctor who is very famous and respectable. The esteem she earned around her made her inches taller and him inches shorter. Earlier, "he had been the

young-man and I his bride. Now, I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (42). The ego clash became inevitable because "I am something more than his wife and he has become what he is"(70). This upside down alteration - this terrible thing - destroys their marriage. She realises the falsity of the notion of equality she had read in books :

a + b they told us in mathematics is equal to b + a. But here a + b was not, definitely not equal to b + a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. ¹⁰

Saru now realises that Manu had started neglecting her quite early, but she did not at that time, ponder over his tone. She was too busy and tired, she was exhilarated with the dignity and importance that her status as a doctor seemed to have given her. But, when she did leave Manu's home and rushed to her father's home she now realises that she is alone. "Knowing, with a kind of cold hopelessness, that, it was not a dream that she dreams at her father's home after leavig Manu, but real. That she was awake, not dreaming, and was truly alone. That there was no one who could comfort her. That, perhaps, there never would be anyone." (43).

Saru remembers that these all complexes came in her life because of her being a successful doctor and Manu's inferiority. This

¹⁰. Ibid, p. 42.

simmering inferiority complex of Manu burst out the day a girl had come to interview her, who asked the following question to Manu:

"How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well.?"

Since that day, Manu became a sadist. He teased her in bed and behaved normally during day time, and wickedly during nights. He said, 'you were earning more than him.' She replied, 'yes, I was.' But, Saru clearly admits that, it did not matter till then. But, later on "The silence went on for so long, he wondered if she would not go on. Her hands, he noticed, moved unceasingly, twisting and untwisting a corner of her sari round her fingers."

She looked up with the face of a person plunging into cold water. He attacked me, 'She said. He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this ... this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body.' (201). It happened again and again. Saru herself says, 'Yes, again and again and yet again. I've lost count.' (201).

She remembers her past that, how and in what situations she was forced to leave her sadist husband. It was Boozie, who was impotent, helped to build her career when her parents were against her admission to medical college. Her liaison with Boozie means nothing since he is after all impotent, but it gives a vicious sadistic twist to Manu's relations with her. He was her godfather. In the novel Saru herself says:

"It was Boozie, who taught me to dress with elegance and simplicity, he who taught me how to speak good English, he who improved my accent, he who taught me how to enjoy good food, how to read and what ... oh everything."¹¹

She also says :

"And Manu? I told myself my relationship with this man could not, would not hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me... that was just his mannerism and meant nothing because of his being impotent by nature. It had nothing to do with me and Manu."¹²

Again she adds :

On the contrary, I told myself, I was helping Manu. It had already penetrated then, that all of Manu's literary talents and ambitions had reached a dead end.¹³

But Manohar took it wrong and developed an evil idea in his mind for Saru. He started to hurt and treat badly Saru at nights. Since then

¹¹ Ibid : p. 91

¹² Ibid : p. 91

¹³ Ibid : p. 91

Saru's suffering started. She did not have a safe place either in Manu's home or in her parental home.

Earlier, she thought that such a terrific experience was a nightmare but the bruises on her body negated her. Bewildered by the ensuing failure of her marriage, she even thinks of leaving her job and being simply a housewife because she cannot bear the shattering of "the eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man" (112). But he cannot bear letting the children go to the third rate schools wearing cheapest clothes. He cannot bear the burden of the family because his earning is not as much as of Saru. So she continues her job. But this acceptance of her role as the leading earning member of the family expresses her anguish through the imaginary advice given by her to the girls in Nalu's college:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband.... That is the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal - teacher role.... Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it is unequal in favour of your husband.

If the scales tell in your favour, god help you, both of you.¹⁴

But she realised with honest astonishment that she had not made this speech after all. She had spoken instead of medicine as a career for women. Finding her unable to bear his cruel sadism she leaves Manohar and her job. She decides to go to her parental home once again. She had decided not to come back because of her parents' ill behaviour. Here she finds herself as a troubled and spoiled lady of the house. None was sharing her problems which were increasing day by day. In such a condition she wanted someone to share but there was none. She feels that she is a creature only half alive. She is unable to save herself from her husband. On the other hand she is unable to share it with anyone that her husband is a sadist. Keeping this question in mind she discussed it with a lawyer:

Can I divorce my husband?

Any reasons ?

He is cruel.

How? Will you be specific. Please give details.¹⁵

Here Saru finds herself in dilemma, on the one hand she broods over it and on the other hand she considers it to be her personal matter which should not be published:

¹⁴, Ibid: p. 13.

¹⁵, Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Ibid : p. 97.

Bed, the one she shared with her husband, was to her an intensely private place. She could not, would not, draw aside the curtains that hid it from the world. Renu and Abhi, if they come to know... and they will eventually, I cannot hide it from them for ever... I will never be able to look them in the face again.¹⁶

Now she thinks that if someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. For some reason she now desires to put herself in another's hands. But she also thinks there are very few people who can shoulder any burdens at all. In the meantime she thinks of Boozie. She goes to him. He opens the door, she smells of the drink Boozie boozing... she stifles a school girlish giggle at the thought. But he welcomes her warmly and says:

Saru, by all that's wonderful! How long is it since you came to see me, girl? And I think of you every day. Every single day. Come in, come in.¹⁷

He pulls her in and gives her a hug. As always, his masculinity overwhelms her. And as always, the astonishment that behind it all was nothing. He looks at her as if he has lost grip over his personal life. He has always been so immensely discreet, never a look, never a glance

¹⁶. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Ibid : p. 97.

¹⁷. Loc. Cit.

at the male students. The drama of interest in pretty girls. The facade of an affair with one of them and Saru has been one of those pawns too. When Saru has realised that she, as a woman, left him cold. But she did not care. For if she is a pawn in his game, so was he in hers. She finds some relief and place in the lap of Boozie and removing some of her mental tiring she comes back from Boozie to Manohar again.

As a woman there is no fault in Saru. She is a middle aged woman, like so many others, plump, large hipped, with seven pearl carrings in her ears, and black beads round her neck. Her hair, like that of the others, parted in the centre and tied into a tight bun just above the nape of her neck. At a moment she looks like a Devi. But there is none to respect or admire her at Manohar's place or is none to respect at her parents place. And in such a condition she is alone as a woman and feels always like an isolated woman. The crescendo of excitement during intercourse means nothing to her because of Manohar's being a sadist husband. He behaves badly at night and in this way she feels that her world is lost. She starts hating the man women relationship which is based on attraction and need not love:

Love... how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futility... turning into the thing they called "love." It's only a word she thought. Take

away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away.¹⁸

This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. Manohar has the only way to regain his lost potency and masculinity through sexual assault upon Sarita, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood leading to a sort of abnormality at night, as he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, turning into a rapist at night. He also expect that she should behave as an average Indian wife performing her duty as a successful doctor. Sarabjit Sandhu aptly remarks in this regard:

This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force imbalancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relations. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable.¹⁹

At this juncture of life, Saru hears the news of her mother's death and goes back to her parents' homes though emotionless. She does not feel at home at her parents' place where once she was born and brought up. Everything looks strange to her in spite of the fact that there is no change in the setting:

¹⁸. Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁹. Sarbjit K. Sandhu, *The Image of Woman in The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991, p. 22.

Inside here, though, there were no changes. The same seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she played hopscotch as a child. The yard was bare as always.²⁰

Though she comes back a totally changed woman, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. The absence of affability in the house sets her pendulum rolling between the two houses:

As she drinks her tea... too sweet and strong... he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that, I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back? ²¹

Her parents has no sympathy for her. In her parental house she also suffers. At this moment she realises that there had been something lacking in her life before. Her parents are not taking her success easily only because they had known her as a child in unbuttoned frocks and bare feet. They curse her that she eats more with her children. At this stage she remembers one of the incidents of her past when one of her friends named Smita came to her and said :

²⁰. Ibid : p. 17.

²¹. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, _op. cit. p. 14.

Can you give me a hundred ? You know I came here for my nephew's thread ceremony ... So I thought, if you lend me a hundred ... I haven't paid the shop for it as yet... I can return the money to you later.... Oh, that's all right. You don't have to worry about that.²²

But now Saru herself needs a Penny because of losing her successful career as a famous lady doctor and ill relationship with her husband. She cannot say all that she wants to. She remembers how many times she had thought committing suicide but could not translate that into action. She has a feeling of abnegation because there had been no way open to her- neither in the present nor in the past. All this happens due largely to a guild consciousness that she has developed :

There can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement
My brother died because I needlessly turned my back on
him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My
husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood.²³

She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Rather, her father, after listening to all the failures in her life in adjusting to her husband, turns his back on her pretending to put rice on the stone. Under such circumstances, Saru feels that if it had been an arranged

²². Ibid : p. 119

²³. Ibid : p. 128.

marriage, she would have got support from her parents. But now she suffers from both : "suffering as well as guilt consciousness".²⁴ These feelings remind her of the fate of one of her friends:

If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of the girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despair nor shame. For the failure had not been hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl.²⁵

She feels that she has done injustice to mother, husband, children and everybody else. Saru tries to compromise with the situation but fails.

She receives Manu's letters but opens none of them. Later she hears the news of his arrival to bring her back. She wants to leave her father's house so as to avoid encounter with him. She feels "the

²⁴. Sarbjit K. Sandhu, *The Image of Woman in The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, op. cit. p. 23.

²⁵. Sashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Ibid : p. 199.

desperation of a trapped animal" (195-96) because of the realization that she had no home at all. She realises in the novel that she is powerful enough to join the fragments of her splintered personality when she thinks about her mother, her father, Dhruva and her husband. She says:

They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... all persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more.²⁶

Saru realises that she had been a puppet because she had made herself one, because she had been afraid of proving her mother right. Ready to go to see her child patient she tells Baba that if Manu comes he should be asked to wait for her. This is a significant step in the revitalization of her relationship with her husband. "The emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife in the end is, therefore, not a rebel but a redeemed wife ... one who is no longer afraid of the

²⁶. Ibid : p. 201.

dark."²⁷ Finally, we see that throughout the novel Saru has attempted to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. The bitter emotions strengthen further. It is not the scorn for her husband but her sense of guilt that sweeps her off her feet. She reacts to every situation and becomes sensitive to every sound, all the time conscious of Manu reaching and knocking at the door. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes, perhaps believing that after being tired of knocking, Manu would depart. Saru remembers that, it is not only she who suffers but her grand mother who had been desorted by her husband but "had never, so she had heard, complained. It is my luck, she said, my fate. It was written on my forehead" (62). Saru's own mother did not have "a room of her own". Baba tells Saru that "silence had become a habit for us" (181). This silence, which symbolises distance between Saru's parents, is praised by Maikaki who called Kamalatai a brave woman who never complained. "She never told anyone about what was happening to her. The amount she ate... I tell you, a sparrow would have eaten more. Your father never noticed because she never ate with him." (99). This silence demarates the confines and outlines the margins. This suggests "that women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose

²⁷. Kamini Dinesh, "Moving Out of the Cloistered Self : Shashi Deshpande's protagonists", *Margins of Erasure : Purdah in the Subcontinental Novel in, English* edited by Jasbir Jain & Amina Amin, New Delhi : Sterling, 1995, p. 204.

culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by the dominant (male) group".²⁸

Sarbjit K. Sandhu remarks that every individual fantasizes about sex.²⁹ But in the realm of every fantasy, there is a tinge of reality. This reality is at times gloomy and at times it leads towards the fulfilment of emotions. Saru grows and through the process of growing she inevitably comes across a number of novel situations, which she could not have imagined, for instance her entrance to the college life as a very simple, straightforward and studious girl, but later on, affected by the company of her friends, coming out as a totally changed person; her becoming a woman and all the time being reminded by her mother of the same: "you should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who is around." (55). And ultimately she starts hating her own womanhood : "I can remember closing my eyes and praying... Oh god, let it not happen to me. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it does not happen".(55).

Again Sandhu remarks that "Saru develops hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. The writer had

²⁸. Showalter, "*Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*", in Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticisms & Theory: A Reader*, London: Longman, 1988, p. 346.

²⁹. Sarbjit K. Sandhu, *The Image of Woman in The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 24.

shown the gap in the mother-daughter relationship or it is a conflict between the old and the young: the traditional and the modern."³⁰

Thus, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the novelist highlights the position of a new woman which appears to be a blend of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; and above all revolt and compromise. All these characteristics are inextricably blended in Saru who represents a section of society, which can be termed as middle class in the modern industrial social structure. Sandhu observed that "Saru is brought up in a traditional atmosphere but the education she receives makes her a changed person with a rebellious attitude towards tradition. As an educated young woman, she does not accept anything without reason."³¹

Thus, the character of Saru powerfully represents a realistic image of the middle class working woman in modern India. The entire novel is artistically conceived and constructed only to underscore this image of woman, focusing on her desire for self emancipation and creation of a new identity.

³⁰. Ibid. : p 25.

³¹. Ibid : p. 25.

Chapter - 3

If I Die Today :

If I Die Today (1982), is Shashi Deshpande's second novel. This novel marks a departure from her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. As this novel begins, we are introduced to Guru coming from his village to get admitted to a modern medical college and hospital set up by Sethji for the treatment of cancer. A disappointed Meera states the following about the pitiable condition of Guru:

... Ashoka tells me there's no hope for him at all. He's going to die. I mean, they're going to operate on him, He'll die in any case.¹

Though others are scared of Guru's impending death, he himself is not. Philosophically he remarks : "If I die Today, you will die tomorrow" (7). Clearly, Guru has "risen above all human weaknesses and crossed that dreadful barrier... the eternal human fear of death" (9). According to Manju, Guru is a detached 'spectator', and Meera also thinks of him in the same way. Manju and her husband Vijay, however, live in a world of make beliefs and speculations. Manju even laughs at Guru's matter-of-fact approach to life. The Dean, his sister Dr. Vidya Agarwal

¹ Shashi Deshpande, *If I Die Today*, Delhi : Vikas Publishing House, 1989, p. 5.

and Dr. Kulkarni seem to be very serious about their medical profession. Dr. Vidya is an abnormal woman - a case fit for the psychiatrist. She leads a secluded life with her brother, while her sister-in-law, Ravi, lives far away in a flat in Bombay. Ravi joins the Dean only when her two children return home from the boarding schools. Dr. Vidya's occasional derangements are so fierce that she first kills Guru, then Tony and finally makes an unsuccessful bid on Vijay. She appears to be always disarrayed and jittery, always fear-ridden and same-faced. At the dinner hosted by Rani, Guru and Manju speak of a convict who has slain "more than forty people" (27). The medical campus is also agog with deaths and murders, including that of a labour leader Prabhakaran Thambhe. Thereafter, Guru dies, "in his sleep" (53), and it is whispered around that he was murdered by one of the medical staff. Then the death of Sumanta's wife is reported and an erstwhile nurse Vimala is implicated in it. Tony is also killed for his quarrelsome outspokenness. As sensitive Mira, Dr. Kulkarni's daughter informs: "Tony uncle ... he's dead. He's floating in the tank near the temple" (88). This very girl once dreams of her imaginary accident and her admission to a hospital where her rude father would come rushing and then she would console him: "'Don't cry daddy.' And then I would die with a smile on my face and he would be heart-broken for ever after."² The girl wishes that her parents were dead,

² Ibid : p. 91.

particularly her hard hearted father. Towards the close of the novel, Dr. Vidya, behaving like an "insane animal" (133), in one of her fits makes a murderous assault on Vijay in the dark of night. The metaphor of 'death', as stated earlier, works as a contrast to that of 'life', about which the narrator remarks : "Every human being has the right to live out his full span of life" (137). In this way the novel *If I Die Today* contains a lot of thrill and suspense.

A detailed critical study of *If I Die Today* can be understood with the help of the following quotation of *Sir Thomas More*:

Then in good faith is there no more difference between
your grace and me, but that I shall die today and you
tomorrow.

If I Die Today is a piece of campus fiction, which was practised by the British novelists like Kingsley Amis, Tom Sharpe, Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge in the 1970's and 1980's. The centre of action in the novel is the S.D.M. college and Hospital established by the present Sethji and his father with a dream to make it "the best in the country" by snaring "the best he could" (Deshpande 1982:2). Ironically, of late the campus has been the safe spot of murders. It is in this background that Guruji, a cousin of Doctor Ashok's, suffering from cancer, is admitted there for treatment. His illness, his attitude to life, his admission in the lives of the medical doctors and their families and his death add to the already disturbed,

otherwise still, atmosphere of the campus. True to his name this Guru from Ashoka's village has risen above "all human weaknesses and crossed that dreadful barrier... the eternal human fear of death" (9). He has come to accept his impending death, which other around him have not, in such a way as they find it impossible "to think of him as a patient" (6). His character is a potent text. Brimming with multiple meanings, it is read differently by different characters on different occasions. He is to Meera, Ashok's wife, "a rather peculiar man... a sadhu ... or sanyasi or something...' not really, but like that" (5), 'unusual', 'unique', 'hom'bly', frank' (8), 'A brave man'..., 'A saint ready to give himself,' capable of 'breakig all barriers, ignoring all formalities and approaching you directly as a human being' (9). He is "all of a piece with no false facade" to Manju, the narrator and "an interfering fool" (83) to Cynthia, "a saint... a blackmailer" (68), "a sick guy" (16) and "either a malacious man or a silly fool" (101). Since he is 'different' from all around him and has begun to "see himself as a spectator" (9) of the drama on the campus, he becomes a disturbing and dangerous presence on the campus hunted by the death of Prabhakar Thambe, 'a leader of the workers in the Sethji's Mills' (103), having genuine feeling for the workers. A man in a million (103), due to wrong diagnosis of his case. Since his death is shrouded in mystory, the campus is raucous with whispers, conjectures and confabulations. At the party hosted by Rani, the Dean's wife who lives in a flat in Bombay away from her husband and joins her husband when her children come to visit their

parents from the boarding schools,; Guru and Manju discuss the case of a convict who has confessed the murders of more than forty people. A few days later Guru is found dead in his sleep, and involvement of some medical staff member is suspected. The doubts are further aggravated by the behaviour of Mirga, Dr. Kulkarni's hyper-sensitive daughter, whose insinuations suggest that her father is involved in Guru's murder. The death of Sumanta's wife adds to the ongoing dance of death and an erstwhile nurse Vimala is implicated in it. When Mirga finds Tomy "floating in the tank near the temple" (88), the fear ridden Psyche of the Campus gets worsened. Its impact on the sensitive soul of Mirga is revealed by the novelist. Mirga becomes hysteric and dreams of an imaginary accident and her subsequent death in a hospital leaving her hard hearted father heart broken. It is only after murderous attack on Vijay, the narrator's husband, in the dark of the night that the true identity of the murderer is revealed, who is none other than Dr. Vidya, the sister of the Dean, whose psychie derangements caused by her secluded life and brother-fixation, compel her to behave, unlike others in her profession, in a way no better than that of "the insane animal of the night" (133).

Deshpande's preoccupation with death, murder and nightmarish suspense in the novel betrayed in this novel, is discernible also in her later novels such as *Come up and Be Dead* (1983) and *The Binding Vine* (1983). It attains dimensions of existential dilemma in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) through *Sarita*, in *Roots and*

Shadows (1983) through *Indu*, and in *That Long Silence* through *Jaya*. The novel seems to be a script of a popular movie combining thrill, mystery, suspense and horror in it in the manner of *Agatha Christie*. It is due to the anxiety of *Christie's* influence that the novelist differentiates her characters in the novel from *Christie*. Without disrespecting the authorial or narratorial intentions. It has to be conceded, however, that Deshpande was to good measure influenced by *Christie*, and that she strives to exploit with considerable success techniques of popular fiction with a tight plot and plausible characters. The twists in the plot are brilliant. She builds the suspense regarding the identity of the murderer, and multiplies it by withholding its disclosure. She is a step ahead of her readers imagination. But what makes her different is perceptible in her marginal voices', which contains her central concerns in them. But for these voices — be they regarding life and death or womanhood or motherhood — the novel would have been a cheap popular hack-work. She exhibits in ample measure that her work is an acceptance of death, 'the fated journey' of Plato, but in no terms celebration of murder. It is a candid rejection of murder; the narrator speaks of it as "hateful, a cruel rejection of man's humanity, his right to live" (109). The death was inevitable in case of Tambe, Guru and Tony as it is in case of those whom they have left behind. But the realization of the way they prematurely reach their destination is tragic and utterly inhuman, for it is not only denial of their potentialities but, of their

right to time. The saving grace of the whole situation is that almost all reject rejection of life and that "life ... goes on as before", which is another truth, and the people strain, if unsuccessfully, towards, "becoming better persons," as they strive to "come through the ordeal purified and cleansed" having "learnt... their lessons" (137). Yet another realization pertaining to fuller understanding of human predicament dawn on these people: "... life is never so definite as all that. We can never change overnight, we are chained to our old selves, and can do no more than muddle on, coping with each day as it comes" (137). Definite, it may not be, but life, as Deshpande presents it in the novel, goes on. After a string of tragic deaths life sprouts again through the narrator who gives birth to a baby girl the day after that terrible night (138). It is this assertion and celebration of life that makes Deshpande's work different from a popular writer — be it Agatha Christie or some one else for novel as such is exploration of human situation and to life in fictional terms with a rich imaginative fullness, where the sole interest does not lie in the surprising terms of the plot and in mystery of 'whodunit' but in the life, which it generates and in the active participation that it depicts.

A.K. Singh, aptly remarks that, "Shashi Deshpande, a good story teller, presents the predicament of women in such a way as would voice her concerns for problems and perils of those of her sex. But she is not self-conscious, as for instance Anita Desai often is, or writing for effect. Further, her particular female characters on occasions more

than one contain larger, if not universal, connotations".³ In *If I Die Today*, as in her other novels, the novelist describes what happens to women after marriage. What they have been, what they have become, and what is in store of them. On the surface, all is well with her middle- class women. They have a relatively happy married life with their not so badly placed husbands and are blessed with children in most cases yet there is something rotten in the state of their domestic and married life, for which to a considerable extent their spouses are somehow responsible. Education, economic independence and motherhood to disturb the existing equation. The story of *Manju* and *Vijay* is a telling instance of it. In this kind of relationship neither the husband (Vijay) is an out and out bad sort, nor is the wife (Manju) a clingy woman who sets out to be a victim. She has been a loving, affectionate and understanding wife before she turned into an emotional pretzel. Now she is neither content nor confident. She is in a rather miserable state and unable to see that her feelings of misery are not due to her faults. She seems to have become a victim of what psychologists call a passive aggressive husband who neither hits the wife nor says even a single angry word to her, but by his actions, words and shy comments makes her feel guilt-ridden and censured. It is through this tender trap that Manju and others like her are

³. A.K. Singh, "Reading into *If I Die Today*," *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by R.S. Pathak, New Delhi : Creative Books, 1998, p. 61.

controlled by their male counterparts. Manju finds her married life fraught with silences and barriers. Even the second pregnancy which is supposed to bring husband and wife closer fails to deliver the desired result, as she feels being slowly silenced and distanced from her motherhood, and finds her first daughter against her wishes growing up and clinging to her father like a vine. Her gynaecologist thinks it as "the case with a second pregnancy" when the husband "isn't cossetting you enough" (13). It seems that the motherhood is the cause of Manju's misery, and it makes her "feel like a breeding animal" (23). The real problem, however, does not lie in womanhood, wifehood or motherhood but in the attitude of the middle-class male, which deprives the woman against the man the moment she becomes a wife. Manju avers:

A marriage. You start off expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But... two people who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jar? Who can see each other but can't communicate? Is this a marriage?⁴

The marriage is almost on the verge of wreckage and "It's the Indian male" (27) who emerges as the villain and the fourth burden on the Indian women. Incidentally, the pattern of relationship remains more or less the same in various sets of relationships in the novel — be it the

4. Shashi Deshpande, *If I Die Today*, op.cit. p. 24.

case of Manju and Vijay, Sunita and Shyam, Suman and Vimala, Shanta and Kulkarni, Meera and Ashok or Cynthia and Tony. Even the 'Oh-so-foreign' Dr. Kulkarni after all is "just a traditional Hindu male" longing for a son and heir, and has reduced his wife Shanta to a dull, colourless "Shadow of her husband" (36). The narrator finds the 'given' motherhood as a burden. Womanhood without motherhood remains inadequate but, it inveigles a woman into dependence, and reduces her to a shadow of her husband. In such a state she has no other place but her husband's to go, which ironically falls short of becoming home, for an invisible wall stands between their hearts. Faced with the question "Are you going back home?" the narrator ruminates:

Was I? Yes, where else could I go? But was I going home because there was no other place? And yet, what could I do? There was Sonu. And this child to come. For a moment, I resented them bitterly. Motherhood, I thought. It's a gap. Keeping you in cage until you lose the desire for freedom; until you forget what the word 'freedom' means⁵.

Even the issueless wives suffer in the novel. The novelist examines the plight of woman from a different perspective by

⁵. Ibid : p. 47.

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presenting the case of an economically independent non-Hindu family and thereby suggesting that the fate of a woman remain the same irrespective of caste, culture, religion or economic status. All was more than well with Tony and Cynthia before marriage. But with the cold touch of marriage new problems crop up. The question 'who earns more of the two?' matters more than anything else in marriage, for Cynthia is a medico and her husband Tony just a Games master. At least Tony feels so (84). Cynthia also understands the malaise that has crept in their marriage and the reason behind "his going down hill." According to her, Tony "had an odd complex too about my being a doctor. If I'd given up my job and become the pathetically clinging female, maybe things could have gone right between us." (95).

In most of these cases marriage seems to have failed or reached the point of wreckage, in spite of, education economic independence and material well being. For Guru nevertheless, marriage is a "relationship in which one dispenses with masks" (41). Ironically, women are at the receiving end. Although majority of them have learnt to live with their fate like Shyama has, and most of them like Meera have to suffer "despair" (4), their newly acquired consciousness prompts them to voice their agony and angst. It is their middle-class mentality that dissuades them from revolting against the tyranny. Even this is no mean achievement on their part because the mentality of the class they come from leaves little scope for its

rebels. The "articulation of one's feelings and reactions is in itself heralding of a revolt and must be taken as such."

Shashi Deshpande has dealt with her favourite theme here in this novel also, where woman's condition remains her principal preoccupation. She continues with it in her works like, *That Long Silence*, in which Jaya examines the state of her existence, and resists from being defined with reference to her husband — as a foot note to him, that compliments but has no independent existence. The doctor invites her to visit him but only with Mohan, her husband: "with your husband, of course" — what did he mean by that? Was it impossible for me to relate to the world without Mohan? A husband is like a sheltering tree.... Vanitamami, did you, without knowing it, speak the most profound truth I'm destined to hear in my life." But as else-where, the novelist does not show the courage with which to explore the woman situation as would endear her to the feminist school. In *If I Die Today* also towards the end of a baby girl is born to the narrator and is named Gauri, the name being her husband's choice. And she too, 'let it be' (138). This is symbolic of reconciliation between the husband and the wife not only in the narrators family, but in all other families; the novelist intends to end the novel with an optimistic conciliatory note.

Deshpande's fictional achievement should not be seen in terms of her subscription or non-subscription to feminism, for a writer of some substance is committed to human situation and not necessarily to

some ideology. She, for herself, chooses the path of conciliation without yielding either to absolute acquiescence or to the temptations of embracing the feminist would, which she would have with slight manipulation of her creative endeavour. Her works mediate between the existing state of women and the female feminist consciousness of her creative endeavour. Her works mediate between the existing state of women and the female feminist consciousness. However, her insights and depth of perception ensure that her fictional creations rise above the staple 'whodunit' sort of work or mere ideological subscription, and go on to become serious reflections on the human condition with particular focus on the perils and predicament of her sex in their world.

Y.S. Sunita Reddy says that "*If I Die Today*, is set in the resident quarters of a large charity hospital where there are a series of killings beginning with the murder of the terminally ill patient Guru. The vast number of characters in the area, their frustrations and disappointments, their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities provide enough material for a gripping murder mystery. But what could have been a taut suspense story meanders aimlessly taking the readers along to an uninspiring end."⁶ Reddy again remarks that "Deshpande is best at the portrayal of human relationships and the turmoils raging

⁶. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001, p. 24.

in the minds of her female protagonists who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands and society is general."⁷

Thus at the end of the story we find that "The narrator Manju in *If I Die Today*, is quite different from the average Indian Woman who views matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in life."⁸ She resents the fact that her children are a barrier to her independence. Motherhood, she thinks, "is a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word 'freedom' means."⁹ She does not approve of her daughter displaying any typically female characteristics like fear or cowardice. She thinks: "I did not want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent." (45). Y.S. Sunita Reddy has aptly said, "Deshpande tries to unmask the outwardly sophisticated and well-educated person's yearning for a son and heir."¹⁰ Pitying Mriga for being unkindly treated by her 'oh - so - foreign' father, Dr. Kulkarni, Manju thinks: "Behind the pipe - smoking perfectly mannered phlegmatic style that he cultivated, was he after all, just a traditional Hindu man longing for a son and heir? And taking it out on poor Mriga because she was only a girl. (36) Deshpande also lays bare the feeble male ego which cannot tolerate the idea of female superiority. Finding a

⁷. Ibid : P. 25.

⁸. Loc cit.

⁹. Shashi Deshpande, *If I Die Today*, Op. cit. p. 47.

¹⁰. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Ibid, P. 26.

sympathetic listener in Manju, Tony unburdens his material problems to her :

Don't let them tell you. It does not matter who earns more money in a marriage. It does There was Cyn before marriage crazy about me, looking up to me, ready to do anything for me. It did not matter at all that I was just a Games Master and she was a medico. We were just crazy about each other.¹¹

Tony very succinctly sums up the main ingredient for a happy marriage. He is happy so long as his wife looks up to him but when she starts earning more than he does, he begins to think that she is patronising him. According to Y.S.Sunita Reddy, "The same situation is dealt within *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where it is the main theme of the novel."¹² It is obvious that in the novel Deshpande is unable to remain unconcerned about the inner turnmoils and sense of unfairness experienced by her female protagonists.

Thus in *If I Die Today*, Shashi Deshpande successfully creates the image of an uncommonly courageous woman Dr. Vidya and substantiates that woman, once determined, can be more ferocious than man. The image of woman created in this novel is really outstanding and remains unforgettable.

¹¹. Shashi Deshpande, *If I Die Today*, Op.Cit., P. 84.

¹². Y.S. Sunita Reddy, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Op Cit. p. 26.

Come Up and Be Dead

The novel, *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), opens with the premature death of Mridula Dutta of the 10th standard. Some think that she died of "brief illness" caused by a terminated pregnancy, while others believe that it was a case of suicide (23). Though the novel briefly mentions the "peaceful, tranquil death" (98) of Devayani's (or Devi's) father, it is largely preoccupied with the mysterious death of Mridula. First they suspect Pratap, the nutty brother of the school Head Mistress working as a Peon-gardener there, to be the cause of her sad death, and the Head Mistress is also implicated in the case. In the midst of the rumours afloat, Pratap is called out of his room and killed in cold-blood. According to the narrator Devi, "Pratap's death had been no accident. He had not died because of a fall from a ladder. Someone had killed him." (144-45). Thereafter, Mrs. Jyoti Raman, the weak-eyed and spectra-thin mother of Sonali (or Sona) is "strangled with her own scarf" (172) on the occasion of the Annual Festival. Last of all, the seventeen-year-old Sharmila is stabbed by her own lover, Sanjay. The last few pages of the novel inform us that Dr. Girish, who is always in need of ample money for his demanding, smart and spendthrift wife and Mr. Verma, who is "a sorrowful widower" (264), are the real villains of the Piece. Of the two, Mr. Verma is worse for having run a

call girl racket at the hotel open Sesame. Thus the metaphor of 'death' is emphatically employed in *Come Up and Be Dead*.

In *Come Up and Be Dead* 'evil' has been powerfully handled. It is the greatest human problem. In this novel it makes its appearance in three forms; revengefulness, lasciviousness, and proneness to commit murders. And through these three forms various images of the characters in the novel can be described.

In the beginning revengefulness is represented in Varma, a member of the Board of Governors of the school, who makes school girls serve as call girls for the simple reason that his own wife had deserted him soon after marriage. Lasciviousness makes its appearance in Sanjay, Sharmila, Mridula and the unnamed stranger to whom Mridula is taken as a call girl. Sanjay has made Sharmila his mistress, who has been one since she was fourteen (261), Mridula becomes pregnant even though she is unmarried (9), and the stranger comes to the hotel 'open Sesame' to have a call girl (251). The proneness to commit murders is there in Sanjay, Girish, and Mridula. Sanjay kills Pratap and Joyti and makes attempts on the lives of Sonali and Sharmila; Girish resolves to eliminate Devayani, and Mridula kills herself.

In this way revengefulness takes a very ugly form in Varma as he is driving innocent girls into the morass of immorality for the humiliation he had to suffer on account of his wife deserting him. A

revengeful man, if he acts logically, can cause harm to the person who has harmed him rather than the person belonging to the sex of the offender. But here Varma is causing harm to the girls who have caused no harm to him. If Varma had been an ordinarily revengeful man, he would have harmed, if at all, his wife, though it is ignoble for a man to cause harm to a woman, especially his wife. But Varma treats the whole female sex as his enemy. This is one of the reasons why his behaviour is found to be odd, if not shocking, by Girish and Prasad. Girish tells Devayani :

Strange, isn't, that a man who has so much money should make himself vulnerable by going in for a thing like this? When I went to him I knew at once that he enjoyed this trade in girls. It was not just the money for him. Some sort of a kink, I suppose.¹

Inspector Prasad also testifies to the fact that "Varma carried a canter of hatred for young women within him..." (264). Varma's revengefulness is akin to the revengefulness of Charles Dickens' Miss Havisham in the novel *Great Expectations*, who began to hate all male human beings because one of them named Compeyson had humiliated her by not turning up to marry her on the appointed day and had broken her heart and who took revenge on Pip making Estella

1. Shashi Deshpande, *Come Up and Be Dead*, Delhi : Vikas Publishing House, 1983, p. 252.

break his heart. As a matter of fact, this is a kind of cowardice as instead of inflicting harm on the wrong doer Varma inflicts harms on the persons who have caused no harm to him and are too weak and helpless to do anything by way of retaliation. Francis Bacon's remark that "...Vindicative persons live the *Life of Witches*, who, as they are mischievous, so end they Infortunate" — appears to be true in Varma's case. What is noticeable in this regard is that he occupies a respectable position in society, as he is a member of the Board of the Governors, and also tries to continue to be respectable. He silences the people, who come to know of his diabolical activities, either by bribing them or by getting them killed. This is evidenced by Girish's remarks: "But his reputation mattered to him, though, and so there I was.... I could make a regular sum of money by just holding my tongue" (252) and by his getting Pratap killed.

How degenerate one becomes in the state of Pasciviousness can be seen in the character of Sanjay. Here the term lasciviousness is the passion that has been described as one's enemy by Lord Krishna in the Gita:

Kama esa Krodha esa rajogunasamudhavah

mahasano mahapama viddhyenamih vairinam

(III.37)²

². *The Bhagvadgita, Trans. S.Radhakrishnan*, Bombay : George Allen And

(This is craving; this is wrath, born of the mode of passion, all devouring and most sinful, know this to be the enemy here).

The relations of Sanjay with Sharmila are, from the Hindu point of view, incestuous, as Sharmila is his cousin and for the Hindus a cousin has to be treated as a sister. Moreover, it is Sanjay who is "responsible for Mridula's pregnancy" (238). But he marries neither Sharmila nor Mridula. He also tried to trap Bunny, who tells "her father a story of being pestered by a young man" (238), and if she had not left the town she must have met the fate of Mridula. Likewise, the strangeman who used Mridula as a call girl in the hotel Open Sesame was degenerate to the extent that he used her body to gratify his lust when she had been made to drink heavily and was not conscious of what was happening to her body. Girish reports : "They must have got the call girl drunk, I suppose, for the next thing she remembered was that she was alone in that room with the strange man" (251).

It is lasciviousness that brought Sharmila "totally under Sanjay's influence" (261), because if she had not been lascivious she would not have remained under his influence totally even if she had surrendered him at the age of fourteen. She is fully under his influence so much so that she acts as an accomplice in his crimes as a murderer and in his efforts to trap school-girls to become call-girls.

Unwin, 1971 p. 148.

Mridula's lasciviousness has its roots in her silliness as she tried to have boy friends and lovers under the impression that by having them she would become 'modern'. Sonali says :

You don't think, do you, that Mridula just got into trouble like that? Oh, she was a crazy girl, all right. She was dying to get into the mod crowd and have boy friends and go running all over town, doing nothing but being silly. She used to flatter Bunny like mad. And Bunny used to ignore her. One day Bunny invited her home and Mridula was so thrilled like as if Indira Gandhi had invited her or the Queen of England.³

Mridula is foolish enough to think that an illicit physical relation is "just a bit of fun" (72). Had she not been excessively eager to become 'modern' even Sanjay would not have been able to do her any harm. Her eagerness to have boy friends clearly indicates that it was her lasciviousness that made her what she became and caused her death. The fact also signifies that the post Independence Pseudo-Western values which have become quite popular in, at least, a section of the Indian society, are, according to Shashi Deshpande, dragging young people away from virtues.

³ Shashi Deshpande, *Come Up and Be Dead*, op. cit. p. 43

In the entire novel *Come Up and Be Dead* six attempts to murder are made, three of which are successful while other three are unsuccessful. The successful attempts are made on the lives of Mridula, Pratap Rao and Mrs. Jyoti Raman, while the unsuccessful attempts are made on the lives of Sonali, Sharmila and Devayani. Sanjay is a participant in all of them either as the doer or as an accomplice. In the case of Mridula, whose is a case of suicide, Sanjay acts as an accomplice. As Sharmila remarks, Mridula "went to Sanjay after that. It think he gave her... whatever she took" (261). Both Pratap and Jyoti are killed by Sanjay as is evident from Girish' observation:

The boy Sanjay came to me that night. He told me Pratap had seen the girls, Sharmila and two others, in the hotel. He had followed them to a room and confronted the girl Sharmila with his accusations. And so Pratap had to be got rid of.⁴

Devayani also asserts : "Bunny... knew something about this school.... And she told Mrs. Raman about this. And because of this knowledge the woman died" (181). Sanjay tried to kill Sonali only because he suspects that she also knows something about his involvement in the trade of call-girls, because he feels that "her mother had told (Sonali) something" (260). He makes an attempt to kill even his mistress

⁴ Ibid, p. 252.

Sharmila because she hinders him from killing Sonali. Sharmila avers : "...I knew he was going to kill Sonali. And when I tried to stop him, he tried to kill me...." (260).

The process that makes Sanjay, a lover, become a murderer trying to kill his own beloved reminds one of the process described in the following verses from the Gita:

dhyayato visayan punsah sangas tesupajayate
sangat sanjayate kamah kamat krodhobhijayate
Krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smrtivibhramah
smrtibhramsad buddhinaso buddhinasat pranaswati⁵

(II. 62-63)

(When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes.).

It is suitable in the process of Sanjay as a lover who later on becomes a murderer of his beloved. When an attempt at Devayani's life is going

5. *The Bhagavadgita, trans. S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit. pp. 125-126.*

to be made by Girish, she notes "that the number he was dealing was not the one I had given him" (244). Girish was trying to contact some murderer, rather than Prasad, and that murderer presumably was Sanjay. Since Sanjay kills or tries to kill the persons who have come to know of the racket in girls being carried on under 'the Big Chief' Varma, it is obvious that he tries to kill those people who can get him punished for his immoral and illicit activities.

Girish's proneness to get people killed has two emotions at its root fear and greed. It is fear that leads him to resolve to get Devayani killed because he cannot afford to let her. "get away from here with that knowledge" (246). If Devayani is allowed to survive, he fears, she may give the details of the racket in girls to the authorities and he may have to undergo punishment. Here he is not simply an accomplice in the crime, but the chief who resolves to eliminate Devayani with the help of a murderer, even though he claims he is "not involved in anything" (252). The Duke in Browning's poem "My Last Douches" killed his wife because he was jealous. '*Come Up and Be Dead*' projects the view that people kill other human beings in the state of fear.

In the murder of Pratap—Girish acts as an accomplice. When Sanjay wanted Pratap to come out to be killed it was Girish who "got Pratap out of the house". (250) and left him there to be taken care of

by Sanjay's cruelty. That Girish becomes an accomplice of murderers for money is evident from the following extract from the novel :

Resolutely I received it, "Why did you get into it?"

He shrugged again, with a track of imitation this

time. "Why? The usual reason, of course. Money"⁶

This kind of behaviour reminds one of the behaviour of Duryodhan and his friends who had resolved to kill the Pandavas out of greed and about whom Arjun says in the Gita:

Yadyapyeti no pasyanti

Lobhopahatacetasah

Kulaksayakritam dosam

mitradrohe ca patakam⁷

(Even if these whose minds are overpowered by greed, see no wrong in the destruction of the family and no crime in treachery to friends).

Here this above reference is able to prove Sanjay's cruelty. As far Girish is concerned his behaviour is so well behaved that it is difficult

⁶. Shashi Deshpande, *Come Up and Be Dead*, op. cit. P. 246.

⁷. *The Bhagvadgita*, Trans. S. Radhakrishnan. op.cit. p. 92.

for one to detect his vices. Even such an intelligent girl as Devayani finds nothing suspicious about him for long and reveals even her innermost feelings to him in the hotel, though afterwards she finds it embarrassing as is evident from the following remarks: "I was embarrassed enough by all the revelation I had already made to this strange man, I hadn't meant to say any of it." (134). Devayani's revealing to him that she has not married because her "mother was epileptic" (133) makes it evident that she is trying to have intimacy with him and all this has been caused by Girish' simulative good behaviour. Even though he is Sanjay's accomplice in Pratap's murder, he goes to the hospital to help Devayani in taking care of Pratap. He pretends to be a well-wisher of the family as is clear from his remark : "They can't say anything... not as yet. Nothing to do but keep him under observation. How did it happen?" (142). He reminds of Edmund Spenser's Archimago who is a villain but pretends to be a saint. Just as Archimago sends the Red Cross Knight away from Una and passes to be absolutely innocent when she comes to ask him where her knight has gone, even though Girish knows all about Pratap's death, he pretends to have been absolutely unaware of it. It is such a person who in Bacon's words "industriously and expressly feigns and pretends to be that he is not."

The proneness to kill someone takes another form in Mridula. She kills herself when her pregnancy is likely to result in a scandal. Pratap informs Devayani : "Now suddenly she began to cry. Noisily like

a child. She didn't even bother to wipe her eyes or her running nose. Just sat and bawled" (72). One way regard her suicide as her punishing herself. But the fact is that her suicide is not a case of inflicting punishment on her because instead of finding fault with herself she is reported to have been trying to find fault with others, as Pratap reports : "I never knew", she said when she had calmed down. "They never told me" (72). If she had committed suicide in order to inflict punishment on herself, she would have refrained from vindicating herself.

The vicious activities of the offenders in the novel signify that the Inspector is right who asserts :

I believe in the theory of evil. Just simple evil that drives men and women to deeds that seem incomprehensible to others. And yet, the truth is that all of us carry this potentiality for evil within us. We have to struggle in all our lives. Some prefer not to struggle, that's all .⁸

Since this view is embodied in the novel, it can be accepted to be the view of the novelist herself. Accepting this view would imply rejecting the one upheld by non-dualists, i.e. that there exists only Brahman and that there exists no evil. Shankaracharya asserts : "The Upanisads

⁸. Shashi Deshpande, *Come Up and Be Dead*, op. cit. pp. 264-265.

teach thus : Starting with the text, O amiable one, before its creation, the universe was but "Existence (Brahman) One without a second." (Chandogyaupanisad, VI, II, 1). He further says : "That (Brahman) visualized, 'I shall become many, I shall be born. That (Brahman) created fire" (Chandogyaupanisad, VI, II, 3). In the Upanisad the universe, manifested as names and forms and referable by the word 'it', is first ascertained to be identified with existence 'before its creation'; then the text shows that the creatorship of fire etc., that follows the visualization of future creation, belongs to that very entity, called Existence..."⁹ Acceptance of the view that evil exists in the world would mean subscribing to a philosophy that accepts the existence of evil. (one such philosophy is Buddhism. In the preaching of Gautam Buddha evil appears in the form of Mara as the following extracts evidences:

"The three daughters of Mara tempted the Bodhisatta, but he paid no attention to them and when Mara saw that he could hinder no desire in the heart of the victorious sumana, he ordered all the evil spirits at his command to attack him and overawe the great muni."¹⁰

9. Brahma - *Sutra Bhasya of Sankaracarya, trans. Swami Gambhiranand*, Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1972, p. 47.

10. *The Gospel of Buddha, Compiled by Paul Carus*, Chicago/London : The Open Court, 1917, pp. 36-37.

Shashi Deshpande also ponders over the question as to what can be done to keep people away from wrong doing. Prasad maintains : "And yet, the truth is that all of us carry this potentiality for evil within us. We have to struggle against it all our lives." He seems to suggest that one can keep oneself away from sin if one struggles against evil all one's life and keep one's evil desires under control by making conscious efforts to achieve the goal. Struggling against the evil inside oneself is not a new concept in India. In the Gita Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to try and restrain his mind from the evil and turn it to the good:

Sankalpaprabhavan kamans tyaktva sarvan asesatah

manasaivendriyagramam viniyamya samantatah

Sanaih sanair uparamed buddhyadhrutigrihi taya

atmasansthan namah krtva na kincid api cintayet¹¹

(vi.24-25)

(Abandoning without exception all desires born of (selfish), will, restraining with the mind all the senses on every side, let him gain little by little tranquility by means of reason controlled by steadiness and having fixed the mind of the Self, let him not think of anything else).

¹¹. *The Bhagavadgita, trans. S. Radhakrishnan*, op. cit. p. 36-37.

But those who do not restrain themselves from evil also have to be taken care of. Shashi Deshpande's suggestion is that steps have to be taken against people indulging in wrong doing when Prasad says : "The heroes are still to come. The man Varma is hoping to get away. But, if I have anything to do with it, he won't ... all his money and influence notwithstanding" (264), or when he resolves to arrest Sanjay, as is evidenced by the following conversation between Devayani and Prasad:

"Have you got him? The man who injured Sharmila?"

"Not yet, but we will. He can't escape us for long" (239).

He is suggesting that wrong-doers are to be punished. And since Prasad's efforts to detect the evil doers have been successful, his approach may be regarded as the approach which his creator would subscribe to. In other words, just as Lord Krishna, in Gita, stands for eliminating the wicked when he says:

paritranaya sadhunami vinasaya ca duskrtam,

dharmanasthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge¹²

(For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment righteousness. I come into being from age to age).

¹². Ibid : p. 155.

Shashi Deshpande subscribes to the view that the wicked have to be punished, whatever the odds.

Thus, finally we notice that the chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school principal, Kashama and her house keeper - cousin, Devayani are spinsters, typically representing women caught between the modern idea of freedom and the traditional need for a husband and home of their own. However, the novel focuses on the images of young college girls who are treated as sex-objects and supplied as call-girls. Those who resist meet their tragic ends. The most outstanding image of woman is noticeable in the character of Jyoti Raman. Through the character of Jyoti Raman, a school teacher, Deshpande also hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. Mrs. Raman is somehow able to free herself from her husband by threatening to commit suicide but there are many others who are not so lucky. Thus obviously, *Come Up and Be Dead* is an off-beat novel which is refreshingly different from Deshpande's all other novels before and after.

Roots And Shadows

Roots and Shadows (1983) is a novel which quite characteristic of Shashi Deshpande. This novel unfolds a tale of triumph and tragedy of a house and a family. Manjari Shukla remarks that "it tells the story not of an individual but of an institution which is threatened by the forces of change and faces dissolution."¹ Akka, a grand old matriarch, is the presiding deity of this institution, who confers peace and security on her willing subjects but who deals ruthlessly with the rebellious. Indu, a sensitive, educated and liberated young woman is caught in this vortex. She questions and challenges Akka's authority and walks out from the house to seek fulfilment in her own personal manner. Akka, however, remains unmoved by such spasmodic protests and refuses to slacken her grip as long as she lives. When she falls critically ill and realizes that her end is near, she chooses Indu as the heiress and wills her entire property including the house in her name. Indu is duly informed of Akka's illness and comes back to the family only to find Akka is dying. She meets Akka and notices that even in the face of death there is a quiet dignity about her.

¹. Manjari Shukla, "Roots and Shadows : A Small-Scale Forsyte Saga," *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by R.S. Pathak, New Delhi : Creative Books, 1998, p. 97

"There was", Indu recalls after her death, "a triumphant gleam in them [Akka's eyes] I could almost see her thoughts ... I made, you come home, didn't I? I brought you back, didn't I? " (18) In real sense Akka has been a deeply traditional woman in her life. When in the novel a final reconciliation takes place between Akka and Indu, the terms of this reconciliation are Akka's. Even while she is gasping for breath, she chides Indu for her willfulness and immaturity. Indu is mesmerised. "There was", admits Indu, "in spite of her weakness, still that quality of arrogance in her voice that had always infuriated me. As a child it had surprised me that she, so abysmally ignorant, so what I-considered stupid, could assume such an air of superiority." (20) Akka is angry that Indu has come alone and not brought her husband with her:

I had something important to tell both of you'. 'You will have to put up with me.' And I wanted to see him, what kind of a husband you have got.'

At that I had to laugh. 'Oh Akka, still intent on approving him, are you?

Three years after our marriage? And what if you don't approve him? Do I give him up? Her eyes showed burt. 'You think that what you do is no concern of ours, do you Indu? You think your life is none of my business? You haven't grown up, child' (19). Akka has been a dominating woman in her life. She inspires Indu through her anger,

her hostility and finally left Indu untouched. After receiving Kaka's letter, Indu is in dilemma whether she should go to her parental home or not. She thinks "what does Akka want to see me for? She had never had any use for me at any time. Why now? And I had been unable to make up my mind. It had been Jayant who had made it up for me by saying, 'Do you have to go?'"²

These are the last words that Akka speaks to Indu, these words of hostility and gentleness which set Indu thinking about the nature of her relationship with Akka. She recalls that Jayant had told her after receiving the summons for coming back. He had dissuaded her from going back to the family because Akka, in his opinion, was only a distant relation. "Do you have to go? After all, she is... what is she of yours? Your father's aunt, isn't she? Rather a distant relation, Indu was furious. "Akka? A distant relation? It has sounded treacherous disloyal. At that moment I had decided... I will go" (20).

Manjari Shukla remarks that "why did Indu come? Did she come because she wanted to disprove her husband's opinion or was it the result of a sheaking desire in her for the family reunion, some deep bond which tickled in her in spite of her anger and hatred for all that Akka stood for? Did Indu finally forgive Akka for her ruthlessness and

². Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, New Delhi : Disha Books, 1996, pp. 19-20.

her autocratic ways? Is there really a complete break, an unbridgable chasm between the world and the values of Akka and those of Indu? Can one entirely break away from one's root and live a life in complete isolation from others, from obligations and responsibilities that normal social life involves! These are some of the questions which *Roots and Shadows* tries to answer"³

The story begins with Indu's arrival at the parental family during Akka's illness. Akka dies shortly afterwards, leaving the ancestral house and property in the name of Indu. It is a very large family encompassing three generations Akka, Indu and Padmini. Akka had, before her death, fixed the marriage of Indu's cousin Padmini called mini without consulting the girl. She had also earmarked a portion of her wealth for this purpose. After Akka's death, Padmini's parents and brothers are worried as to whether Indu would honour Akka's wishes to meet the expenses of Padmini's marriage. Indu honours her wishes, although she tries to persuade Padmini to marry Naren instead of the person chosen by Akka. But Padmini and her parents are not prepared for it. Y.S. Sharadha calls it "The Problem of marriage and Affirmation of self. Analysing Padmini's character she adds that "since a girl's mind ever since her childhood is tuned that

3. Manjari Shukla, *Roots and Shadows : A Small - Scale Forsyte saga*, *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, op.cit, p. 98.

she is a *Paraya Dhan*, she tries to attach a lot of importance to it."⁴ Manjari Shukla remarks that "Indu broods over the fate of women in a large family and deeply resents the fact nothing more than puppets, without any identity, voice or nature. But her revolutionary idealism finds no takers in the family."⁵ Even Padmini refuses to romanticise her marriage which for her is an arrangement arrived at for her own good by the elders whose wisdom must be accepted. Indu tries to argue with Mini but is deeply perplexed by Mini's response:

But Mini... marriage is... It means living with a man. You have to listen to him, endure his habits, his smell, his touch, his likes, his dislikes. You have to sleep with him, bear him children. Can you do all that with this man? She put the nutcrackers down gently and picking up her still wet hair, knotted it at the base of her neck... What choice do I have, Indu? She asked me, resuming her snipping. Snip ship... the supari fell between us. Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country. Surely it was time, they stopped asking it. What choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can

⁴. Y.S. Sharadha, "The Problem of Marriage and Affirmation of Self in Roots and Shadows," *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi : Khosla Publishing House, 2001, p. 52.

⁵. Manjari Shukla, "Roots and Shadows : A Small-Scale Forsyte Saga", *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, op.cit. p. 99.

choose, that differentiates me from the animals. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no choices⁶.

Indu is even more deeply disturbed when she finds older women wallowing in their ignorance and even gloating over it:

I knew these women had their own standards for judging people. Nothing about me.... my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money... none of these would impress her. To her, I was just a childless woman. To get married to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren... they were still for them the only success a woman could have. I had almost forgotten this breed of women since I had left home. Now, seeing them was like discovering a new world. Each one of them, riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition, was a world of darkness in herself. And, even more amazing was their ignorance of their own darkness.⁷

⁶ Shashi Deshpande,

⁶ Op Cit. P.P. 124-125.

⁷ Ibid, p. 116.

Despite Indu's opposition, Padmini is married to the man chosen by Akka. Y.S. Sharaddha remarks that "It is indeed a tragedy that even in the modern age, Indian girls echo the same sentiment where it was marriage that mattered not the man."⁸

Indu who has married against the wishes of the family is surprised to hear about Padmini's acceptance to the proposal in spite of the fact that the boy had "heavy, coarse features and crude mannerisms". (3) Indu question Mini if she does not consider it a point to think of marriage. Mini replies "Why should I think of it? I am past twenty four. I have to get married. What else is there to think about!" (124).

Indu had waited for Mini's marriage to be over before disposing off the house. Once the marriage is over, she decides to sel the house. There is some opposition from her uncles, but her cousins are all for the sale of the house and pester Indu to help them settle in their lives. The sale negotiations are completed, and Shankarappa who bought the house and build a modern hotel on its site. When the moment for the final parting with the ancestral house comes, Indu, the iconoclast, becomes very emotional and is flooded with memories of her past life

⁸. Y.S. Sharadha. "The Problem of Marriage and Affirmation of self in Roots and Shadows", *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, op. cit, p. 52.

spent in this house. The thought that the house would be demolished and would cease to exist jolts her;

Would it? The wall would crumble, the roof would crash down. The wood work would be neatly piled up in lorries and carried away. But what of the feelings, the emotions, the passions the house had sheltered? Would they not linger here, where they had been born and nurtured? If, not, where would they go? I had been a fifteen-days-old motherless infant when I had been brought into this house. I had lived eighteen years in it. Now, all those eighteen years compressed themselves into one moment of painful intensity and I lived those eighteen years all over again. ... The feeling of ease, contentment and indolence embracing the whole house. And the huge front door, which no child could ever push the whole way, standing wide open the whole day, so that people just walked in and became part of the family. And aura of warmth that didn't have to be said in words, smiles, dinners and drinks. This was home. Where one lived. Not stayed.⁹

But such moments of nostalgia and sentimentality are a passing fancy. The house was infact a trap specially for those who had dreams

⁹. Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, op. cit. pp. 96-97.

of their own and wanted to live those dreams, for dreams are incompatible with authority and discipline, which is what the house symbolised. And it not Indu alone who had been a victim of authority and discipline. Akka's autocratic ways and iron rule ruined all the members of the house and reduced them to mere parasites because Akka believed only in surrender and submission. Defiance and disobedience did not exist in the vocabulary of the presiding deity of this house. Now that she was dead, the house without its deity held no sanctity, and therefore it must go. Those in the family who favoured the retention of the house were guided more by selfish considerations than by loyalty or commitment to Akka.

Indu fights back her emotional reverie. As soon as Padmini's marriage is solemnised, Indu hands over the house to Shankarappa. Shankarappa leaves, promising to be back with the demolition squad. And as he is leaving, he says to Indu : " 'come back home agains. Soon', leaving Indu thinking of the meaning of his words. 'Home? Not any more. There had been a morbid fascination in childhood in saying the words... 'the last time!' Now it was like facing death, knowing there is no after life." She remains cool and refuses to weep for the house when so much more had been destroyed within its four walls:

As a matter of fact, I felt neither mournful, nor desolate, but in a peculiar way, both light and free. Yes, the house had been a trap too, binding to the past I had to move

away from. Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself.¹⁰

In this way the three generations of dreams are reduced to rubbles. What had symbolised roots was infact was a meaningless facade— at least for Indu.

According to Manjari Shukla, "family here provides emotional sustenance, and wards off loveliness or the sense of being lost. Therefore while practically everybody in the novel resents Akka's authoritarian behaviour, nobody ever questions her contribution in keeping the family intact despite its contradictions and the clashing aspirations of its members. After all, Akka has had her own share of miseries."¹¹ Akka came to this house as a widowed young woman, and after the death of her father looked after her nephews and nieces with the care and attention of a truly compassionate mother. Married in her early age she was unknown about love, sex and other husband wife relations and in such a way she was forcibly sent in her husband's room and there he brutally treats her. Finally, she leaves her husband's house and comes back to her parental home. Indu herself, whose mother died immediately after her birth, was never allowed to feel

¹⁰. Ibid. p. 168.

¹¹. Manjari Shukla, "Roots and Shadow, A Small - Scale Porsyte Saga", *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, op. cit., p. 103.

motherless. True, Akka sometimes becomes ruthless and dictatorial but there is no touch in her character of self-aggrandisement. She was cared by Akka. Her looking-after took place by Akka. That is why Indu is dominated by Akka's traditional ideals. She wanted to keep the family intact because the family ensured security and happiness to all its members. Even Indu, the representative of the new generation and one who has a personal score to settle with Akka, concedes that Akka was a 'cohesive force' and always struggled to keep the fabric of family intact.

Next in the novel we find Indu the chief protagonist as a journalist lives according to her own wishes and desires. Indu (or the generation that she represents) hankers for freedom, little knowing that freedom may also become a trap. In the novel when she decides to marry Jayant in defiance of the wishes of the family, it was a symbolic act of self-assertion, a declaration of independence, and a bold affirmation of her identity as an individual. But once this freedom came to her, it became a routine. Whatever she did, even the way she dressed and spoke, fell into a pattern:

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would

please him. And I can not blame him. It's not he who has pressurised me into this. It's the way I want to be.¹²

Indu herself accepts it that without Jayant she is incomplete. She has deep love for him. Even Akka is against it. She says:

This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant I had not known it... that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost to be alone.¹³

Indu comes back to her ancestral place from where she, against the wishes of her father and other members of the family, had accepted so many years ago to get married to a person of her own choice. She comes back to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change though everybody is unaware of it. And the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu.

Indu has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be free and independent. But, now, a number of questions come before her, which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only

¹². Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, op. cit., p. 49.

¹³. Ibid, p. 31.

to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not a true love. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wanted to show her family that she was a success. Is she her own self even when she is working or is it her tragedy never to be free and complete? Sarabjit Sandhu remarks that "She goes back to her parent's home to find out the roots, but she finds the shadows instead."¹⁴ It becomes a time of reckoning for her. She thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage, her own marriage based on love, etc. She revolts against Akka's hard and disciplined rule where there is no value of practical life. She is a traditional lady. In such a condition Indu projects against the women belonging to the older generation. Sarabjit Sandhu remarks that "Shashi Deshpande has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set-up. One set is represented by Akka, Narwada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya; and the other set is represented by Indu."¹⁵ To the old generation, a woman's life is nothing "but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren" (128). In the long list of these women characters, Akka deserves special qualities. She is a rich childless widow who opts to stay in her brothers house after the death of her husband. Since the day she enters the house she maintains absolute control over her brother's children.

¹⁴. Sarabjit Sandhu, Roots and Shadows, *The Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

As the novel proceeds we see that day by day Akka becomes a bold lady. She is a lady of strong rule and hard discipline. Every members in the family fear to her as well as respect her. She is such a traditional and a lady of strong rule that when she is on her death bed. She refuses to move into a hospital because as she puts it, "God knows what caste the nurses are or the doctors. I could not drink a drop of water there." (24). Akka is also very particular about how a girl should talk, dress or behave. She reprimands Indu severely for daring to talk to a boy in the love corner of a library. It is a known fact in the house that she had put her foot down when Naren's mother wanted to learn music saying:

What, learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like Those women? Are we that kind of family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know?¹⁶

Indu grows with no fond feelings towards Akka, learns her story through Narmada Atya, only after her death. She says in her own words :

She was just 12 when she was married. And he was well past 30. Remember him still. He was a tall, bulky man

¹⁶. Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, op. cit., p. 55.

with large, coarse features. And she... she was small, dainty, really pretty, with her round face, fair, skin, straight nose and curly hair. Six months after her marriage, she 'grew up' and went to her husband's home. What she had to endure there, no one knows. She never told anyone. Our grandfather, her father, was a man who kept himself aloof. No one could approach him easily. And her mother, our grandmother, died when she was a child. But I heard that twice she tried to run away — a girl of 13. Her mother-in-law, I heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days, starved her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband's room. The child they said, cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, "Lock me up again, lock me up". But there was no escape from a husband then. I remember her telling me before my own marriage was consummated, "Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels."¹⁷

But as time passes and confidence comes in Akka she tries to make herself bold and a disciplined lady. Next Narmada says that she controls her husband after he suffers from a stroke which leaves him

¹⁷. Ibid, p. 77.

totally paralysed. He lives for two years in this condition when Akka takes care of him excellently, displaying her sati-dharma. But she gets back at him for all that she had endured earlier by not allowing his mistress, whom he adores, to meet him. She even takes a vicious pleasure in informing him that she threw his mistress out when she had come to meet him. Narwada, who is just a child then, is moved to tears by the grief experienced by Akka's husband on hearing this from his wife. Later that night Narmada also finds Akka in tears and learns from her that no night passed when she did not cry after getting married. Y.S. Sunita Reddy remarks that "in arranged marriages a husband who finds his wife incompatible has at least the option of finding for himself another woman to satisfy his need; but a wife in a similar situation has no option but to lead a loneless life."¹⁸ In the same context Neena Arora remarks:

Man considers it as normal behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and physical levels outside marriage, while it is ruthlessly condemned as adultery in case a woman indulges in it even though accidentally the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not even involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards

¹⁸. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "A Restricting Bond": Roots and Shadows, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, op.cit., p. 36.

his wife and starts prosecuting her. This condemnation is dictated by man's interest in preserving his property rather than by any moral consideration."¹⁹

In the course of time Akka's married life could not be a successful life. Akka returns to her father's house after the death of her husband. Here at her parental home she maintains strict rule for all. Indu, the central character in the novel. She says to Indu that a woman should never utter her husband's name as it would shorten his life span and that it showed disrespect. But Indu reacts such talk and exclaims, "what connection can there be between a man's longevity and his wife's calling him by name? It is as bad as praying to the *Tulsi* to increase his life span." (35) We see Indu is presented by the novelist as an educated, upper-middle-class woman who revolts such traditional practices where women are not more than a puppet. She breaks the clutches of tradition and finds that there is no difference between the women who circumambulate the *Tulsi* plant and who believes that a woman's good fortune lies in dying before her husband. Indu has a love marriage and she loves her husband enough to want him by her side all the time, forever. Her husband, Jayant, in spite of his seemingly western style of living, is no different from the average Indian male.

¹⁹. Neena Arora, Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing, *A Feminist Study in Comparison*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 61.

After her marriage Indu always tries to keep her husband happy and satisfied. Even during such time she continued to write for the magazine although Jayant knows that it is very frustrating for her. At this juncture she narrates that how she once interviewed a social worker who received an award for her services. Indu was suitably impressed by the woman who was "soft-spoken, articulate, seemingly sincere and dedicated". (18) After writing up the article, Indu was given another article written about the same woman by an old man. Indu was shocked to read it. She thought : "This ... was a story of shameless exploitation of ignorance, poverty and need. A story of ruthlessness and unscrupulousness in the pursuit of fame, power and money, all of which had come now." (18) She went to her editor with both the copies and, worldly-wise as he was, he refused to accept the copy written by the old man, though he admitted that he was true. Indu was taken aback by the hypocrisy of the woman and the attitude of the editor. She narrated the story to Jayant and expected him to stand by what was right, but contrary to her expectations he replied, "That is life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures. We need the money, don't we? Don't forget we have a long way to go." (19) Later on we see that Indu continues writing what was accepted by the editor and the public. It also disturbs her to realize that she has left her middle-class values behind to become a part of the success oriented society. She is overcome by a sense of futility. She, perhaps, would

have continued to live this way if she was not summoned by Akka and if she did not meet Naren. Her reunion with Naren offers her an opportunity to vent her frustrations and review her life objectively. She relates to Naren her life with Jayant in detail:

We belong to the smart young set. Do you know what that means? Fresh flowers in the house everyday. Can you believe it, Naren. I've gone and done a course in flower arrangement? The best places, whether you go out to eat or to cut your hair. Freshly laundered clothes twice a day. Clothes ... yes, we have to keep up with the latest trends... we don't have friends, but the right contacts and "people one should know." Who entertains us just as often as we entertain them. And when we get together ... oh, you should listen to us Naren.... We are rational, unprejudiced, broad minded. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly, the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption and family planning. We scorn the corrupt. We despise the ignorant, we hate the wicked — and our hearts bleed, Naren for Vietnam, for the blacks, for the Harijans but frankly we don't care a damn not one goddamn about anything but our own precious selves, our own precious walled in lives."²⁰

²⁰. Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, op. cit., p. 28.

Here Indu tries to prove that she has full control over herself in order to protect her marriage. It is difficult for her to accept her compromise in this matter as she had all along flooded herself that she was different from her Kakis and Atyas. In this respect, P. Bhatnagar comments that "It baffled her to realize that she who had considered herself to be so independent, so intelligent, so clever, she who had been so proud of her logical and rational thinking : she who had seen all set to reform Indians womanhood and fallen into the trap waiting for her."²¹

This quotatoin proves that Indu is very conscious of the unfairness prevailig in society with regard to women. Right from her childhood, Indu observes the secondary position occupied by woman in the family. She laughingly asks her Kaka, "Can you imagine them sending up a cup of tea for me.' Women and children should know their places." (33). Inspite of her being highly sensitive to the injustice shown to women, and inspite of being educated and economically independent, Indu realizes that she is no different from the women like her Atyas and Kakis.

Indu feels that she is disillusioned by her husband. He expects his wife to be demure and coy, without shedding her inhibitions even in

²¹. P. Bhatnagar, "Indian Womanhood : Fight for Freedom in Roots and Shadows," *Indian Women Novelist*, edited by R.K. Dhawan, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 121.

the privacy of their bedroom. Indu herself narrates that "Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and saying, 'no not now', when I had taken the initiative." (91) She continues saying her passive relations with Jayant to Naren that "'I don't know'. I put my head on my knees and stared at the carpet unseeingly. 'Nothing really, when I try to rationalise. But... you know the word "deflowered" they use for girls, Naren! I thought of it when Jayant touched me for the first time. I felt as if my body had....' I looked up at him and smiled. I remember I even thought of a good phrase... I don't know, but I told myself my body had "burgeoned into a flower of exquisite felicity." (82-83) Indu also adds that 'I had, for some time, loved Jayant. But between the idea and the reality there is an immeasurable distance. To see, to feel a real man was so far removed from the idea of love as it was to me then... Hearing these all Naren smiles who has been watching Indu silently saying her past love with Jayant.(83).

Later on Indu feels deeply attracted towards Naren and feels natural response. She herself says "my response to him was so natural, so much beyond me and outside me..." (83) She feels warm and excited moment now but in her heart a place for Jayant was left even now also. Her this state in the novel proves it when she says that "When Naren tried to kiss me, I thought ... this is Jayant (83) She says to Naren that "I am not a pure woman. Not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it." (83) She finds her alter ego in

Jayant. She feels that in marrying him, she is complete. In Jayant, she thinks that there is the other part of her whole self, total understanding and perfect communication. And finally she feels that she is cheated by Jayant, feels ashamed in loving her.

Next Jayant says that 'you don't understand me',... we had so often flung the words at each other. And one day I had realised that what we were saying was... Don't judge me. Don't Criticise me. Just appreciate me. See only my virtues, not my vices. My strengths, not my weaknesses. This is what we want. And we call it perfect understanding." (115).

It has now become difficult for Indu, however, to remain totally indifferent to her husband. Her home-coming after a long exile makes her feel tremendously happy but, for her, this happiness is incomplete without Jayant by her side. She thinks "This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself." (34) But as time passes she prepared in her mind an idea to become an "ideal woman" — A woman who sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in her husband. This desperate need to assert herself combined with the attraction she felt for her cousin. Naren and the easy compatibility between them makes her take a daring step in surrendering herself to him. She thinks —

I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately I went to my bed

and began folding the covers. I don't need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado.²²

She feels that her sexual encounter with Naren has nothing to do with Jayant, and so she resolves not to tell him anything about it. Commenting on her decision not to reveal this to her husband, P. Ramamoorthy says : "This sheds a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of the human existence."²³ In the entire novel we get the same echoe. On the terms of her married life Indu feels that "her casual matter and matter of fact attitude to what she had done is shocking have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of the modern Indian woman?" (129). Y.S. Sunita Reddy says that "perhaps this is Deshpande's answer to the double standards practised by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties."²⁴

²². Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, op.cit. p. 108.

²³. P. Ramamoorthy, "My Life is My Own : A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Women," *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, edited by Sushila Singh, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 124.

²⁴. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "A Restricting Bond" : *Roots and Shadows, A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, op. cit., p. 43.

At the end of the novel Indu feels an emancipated woman. She is now the owner of Akka's money. This very freedom of money motivates her to spend money on Mini's wedding and Vithal's education. Finally, she does achieve her freedom refusing to let herself be influenced by Kaka, Atya or even Jayant, in doing what she believes is the right thing to do. Y.S. Sunita Reddy remarks that "in a global drama involving the dance of the sexes, she emerges as an intelligent, attractive and wholly practical woman who is not lured into a relationship but enters into it fully aware of the consequences and confident that she is not stretching her moral obligations."²⁵

Thus, *Roots and Shadows* reveals the theme of double standard practiced openly by men for centuries causing unspeakable misery to married Indian women. But the greatness of Shashi Deshpande in this novel consists in portraying an unusual image of a married woman (Indu) who, as a sharp reaction against the double moral standard of her husband, begins to practise clandestinely the double moral standard herself at the physical level indulging her hidden hunger and aspiration. This novel, like the succeeding novel, *That Long Silence*, underscores woman's full autonomy to like satisfying life throwing to the winds all the crippling conditions imposed on her by the male-oriented society. Thus the image of woman painted in *Roots and Shadows*, is quite challenging.

²⁵. Ibid, p. 47.

That Long Silence

That Long Silence (1988) is the fifth momentous novel of Shashi Deshpande which won her the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991. Suman Bala remarks that "Shashi Deshpande's novels represent the contemporary woman's struggle to define and attain an autonomous self-hood and underline the need to eschew the Authoritarian submission Syndrome in order to attain a liberated self-actualization."¹ Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, aptly represents these facets of the contemporary woman. "She wants to understand her own bare self, devoid of all embellishments, as that alone can prove to be a reservoir of strength in her tedious, lonely journey towards self-actualization".² Y.S. Sunita Reddy says that "*That Long Silence* portrays the conflict in the mind of the narrator between the writer and the housewife."³ Mrinalini Sebastian has aptly said that "in this novel we see that the protagonist is able to be what she is because she has been created with a skill to express herself, to

¹. Rashmi Gaur, "That Long Silence : Journey Towards Self Actualization". *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi : Khosla Publishing House, 2001, p. 88

². Ibid : p. 89.

³. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "Silent No More": *That Long Silence*", *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 2001, p. 73.

write."⁴ In this novel Deshpande presents Jaya, the protagonist as a wife and also as a writer.

This momentous masterpiece of Deshpande opens with Jaya, the heroine and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar, Bombay where they had stayed immediately after getting married when their financial condition was not good. She bore him two children called Rahul and Rati and the third child was aborted. They shift into their old apartment in order to escape the scene as Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an enquiry is in progress. Here, in a small old flat, Jaya gets out of touch with her daily schedule and becomes an introvert. She sits deep in contemplation, thinking of her childhood and tries to analyze herself.

Not satisfied with her married life, Jaya recalls her past days, her up-bringing the environment in which she was brought up and the preaching that thrust upon her when she was growing up, e.g. she has been taught that "a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies." (32).

⁴. Mrinalini Sebastian, *The Enterprise of Reading Differently : The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Post colonial Arguments*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 2000, p. 169.

Jaya, an educated girl tries to balance between her writing and being a successful wife. On the one hand she is influenced by the modern thought of the west and other advanced countries and on the other advanced countries and on the other hand she wants to compare herself with the image of Sita, Draupadi and other ideal mythological characters. She herself says in the novel that:

... Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi Statically sharing her husband's travels...

No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can not fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together... It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be pain ful.⁵

In the novel we see that she always tries her best to keep a balance between husband and wife: "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel." (7)

On the occasions of Raveti's birthday, Jaya as well as her daughter, Rati, feel that Mohan loves his niece Raveti more than his

⁵ Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, New Delhi : Penguin Books, 1989, P. 11-12.

own daughter. But she does not say anything to Mohan as he only dismisses it as her "Writer's imagination" and nothing more. It is only because she always wishes to proceed as per her husband's wish. Rashmi Gaur comments that "she wants to cram herself into the ideological mould of traditional housewife but her innate sensitivity revolts against it. As a wife she is expected to accomplish her destiny through husband but she is also not able to give up her individuality. Oscillating between desire and disgust, she constantly tries to bridge the gap between the mythicized wife and mother and her own experiences of being a wife and a mother and is often racked by pangs of guilt and inadequacy."⁶ Sarabjit K. Sandhu remarks that "Generally a woman's identity is defined by others, in terms of her relationship. With men, i.e., as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, etc. The question "what a woman does" is never asked, but "who she belongs to" is always considered important. She doesn't have an identity of her own. Her name keeps on changing according to wishes of others".⁷ As the story proceeds we find that in *That Long Silence*, Jaya is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a "soft, smiling, placid, motherly

6. Rashmi Gaur, *That Long Silence : Journey Towards Self- Actualization , Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001, p. 90.

7. Sarabjit K. Sandhu, "That Long Silence", *The Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, p. 37.

woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped. (16) Rashmi Gaur says it "The story of the crow and the sparrow becomes an ironical symbol of her life, wherein the weak and the sensitive can be treated with cruel carelessness by the more successful ones".⁸

As time passes Jaya finds herself in the midst of a domestic storm. Her normal routine is disrupted by the investigation into her husband's corrupt practices at office. And as a result Jaya and Mohan have to disappear into exile from their posh Churchgate flat into a small apartment in Dadar, where they had once lived soon after their marriage. Away from her comfortable life, with her husband in a depressed state of mind, and her children on a holiday, Jaya finds her existence so altered and disturbed by the changed circumstances of their life that for the first time she begins to question herself. Her husband has lost his status, and she, her identity, as a result. Traditionally, a woman has an identity only as her father's daughter, her husband's wife, or as her son's mother. Her inward quest makes her realize that:

The real picture, the real "you" never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.⁹

⁸. Ibid, p. 90.

⁹. Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, op. cit. p. 1.

Jaya thinks the statement said by Kamat her lover where he had said, "Jaya - your name is like your face. She remembers her past only because day by day Mohan becomes a changed person. He has no more interest and affection in Jaya than other women who were his mistresses . At one place in the novel Mohan has aptly said, "Physical touching is for me a momentous thing." (15) Again Jaya adds that "we were husband and wife and he could hold me, touch me, caress me. But it was never a casual or light hearted thing for either of us. And then this man... I can remember how his gift of casual, physical contact had amazed me. His awareness of my shock the first time he did it had told me what touching meant to him. Nothing. And yet that day his dispassionate tone, his detached touch, had somehow angered me." (15) She finds herself poor and helpless because Mohan sleeps with his mistress except Jaya. And Jaya has kept in her mind to be a traditional and mythical wife like Sita and Savitri. But at the same time being a writer she is also a lady of western culture. Over it all she has decided to make a balance between her writing and being a wife. Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. Jaya symbolizes revolt and Suhasini submission. Her personality as Jaya impresses her to revolt her husband and she revolts also but her other traits of personality, Suhasini forces her to revolt silently. Therefore she bears the hurting of her husband for a long time and tries to prove herself as a mythical wife. This is the reason that for seventeen long

years, Jaya manages to suppress her feelings, thininking that it is more important to be a good wife than a good writer.

In this way the dreams of her childhood, to change the ascribed situation of woman where a woman gets love and honour of a husband, are shattered. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything to improve her situation. Ultimately, she tries to adapt herself to the mains corrent. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and calls it "strength" : "He saw strength in the woman siting silently infront of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so better that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender." (36).

In this novel we see a different kind of relationship between husband and wife, here the husband is dominating and the wife is suffering. Mohan hurts his wife Jaya and she remains silent. In the entire novel when Jaya once goes out of her house and Mohan feels it bad and asks:

Where did you go today? Tell me. Open your mouth, why don't you open your mouth, you bloody whore? Open your mouth and speak the truth. Where did you go today? Can't you reply? Has some one cut your tongue? Tell me quick or I'll give it to you. Talk. Fast. Say something.

The sound of a blow. Soft moans.

Open your mouth, you bitch. Tell me where you went.
Speak.

Another blow. And surely a kick? Moans again.¹⁰

When Mohan forced her to speak Jaya did not reply and he hurted her.
When he do not find any reply from Jaya he kicks her again:

Another kick. Moans again. But any reply to the question.
Just a soft moans at first. Once an involuntary cry
softened into a wail 'mother, mother, mother:

Your mother is another whore like you. Tell me where
you went. Damn you, speak before I smash all your
bones.¹¹

She cannot say why her husband is treating in such a manner. She has to tolerate everything : "The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him." (98) In her married life Jaya could not admit her feelings to herself with sincerity, as to love her husband and to be happy was a duty she owed to herself and to society. She has surrendered her decisions to her husband.

¹⁰. Ibid, p. 57.

¹¹. Loc. cit.

Jaya had taught herself to wait in silence to accept her husband's desires mutely. After this mental activity, she feels bewildered when faced with the challenge to be herself, "To know what you want.... I have been denied that.... Even now I do not know what I want." (25) Jaya is forced to stay in Dadar flat. Being alone she reconsiders her life with some objective detachment. In the vacant time and space, her previous life is laid bare before her mind. For them life became just a shadow because there is no healthy communication between them. She herself says that "It was like sitting in a stationary train. There is movement, bustle, noise all about you, your train is gathering speed, and you are off. (24) There is no support of Mohan at any stage in her life. She adjusts the situations and the self as they are. The appalling banality of the life which she leads frustrates and angers her with a finality. She realizes the futility of a life which is built around the needs of a husband only, "The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives. Deprived of his routine, his files, his telephone, his appointments, he seemed to be no one at all; certainly not that man, my husband, around whose needs and desires my own life revolved. There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do, nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy." (24-25).

Jaya is very sad and unable to remove her sorrow except being silent and facing her husband's hurtings. She feels that "the woman who had shopped and cooked, cleaned, organised and cared for her

home and her family with such passion... where had she gone? We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies, and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness." (25) However, she is now free from her daily burden of repetitive chores, she also experiences a strange sense of undeluted freedom, as the woman's work within the house does not create anything permanent - it does not impart her any freedom either:

And yet I had a curious sense of freedom. There was nothing to be cleaned, nothing to be arranged or rearranged,... I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curious that had to be kept spotless and dust free, and those clothes, God, all those never ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again.¹²

In this way finding herself failed as a successful wife Jaya's writer personality comes out. She starts to write short stories. One of her short stories bags the first prize and is published in a magazine. Mohan who mostly tolerates her writing as something quite harmless and even takes pride in being the husband of a writer, displays an

¹². Ibid, p. 25.

insensitivity and intolerance about a particular short story written by his wife. The story in question is about "a couple, a man who could not reach out of his wife except through her body" (144). Mohan thinks that the story portrays their own personal life and he is very apprehensive of the idea that the people of his acquaintance may assume that he is the kind of person portrayed in the story. This is enough to jeopardize Jaya's career as a writer. Though she knows that there is no truth in what her husband thinks she does not try to reason with him. She thinks, "Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced. I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that." (144) To Mohan, Jaya is not a writer, only an exhibitionist. Even there has been few details of their life in the story but it has not been a relating of her experience but a transmuting it into something quite different. But she could not say this to Mohan. She is ashamed.

Later on Jaya begins to write under an assumed name. But her stories are rejected by one publisher after another. Once while trying to analyse the reason behind the series of rejections, her neighbour, Kamat, after reading the rejected stories, tells her that they are devoid of any strong emotion since she has carefully censored all the anger from the story making it impersonal and shown of a personal vision. Jaya argues with Kamat that it is not a womanly trait to show anger. Here she is merely repeating the words used by her husband on the occasion of their first quarrel after marriage. She asserts, "A woman

can never be angry. She can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated." (147) We also notice that in her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. But after her marriage, she changes automatically, her anger withers away: "she was a child who used to get angry very soon. But after her marriage she tolerated her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman 'uncommonly'". (83) When Kamat asks why she has not expressed the anger of woman in her writings, her reply is : "Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?" (147).

She respects her husband even after his hurting nature only because when she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she, at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. She has been more closer to her father than to her mother. Even when her mother scolds her or questions her going out and returning home late, she complains against her mother to her father. But following the same method as she has been in her childhood, she can never create depth in her stories. So, Kamat refuses to pamper her mood of self-pity and admonishes her instead : "Beware of this 'women are the victims' theory of yours. It will drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self pity. Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't skulk behind a false name. And work - work if you want others to take you seriously." (148).

Jaya later starts writing light, humorous pieces on the travails of a middle class house-wife in a column titled "Seeta". This receives a good response from the editors and readers and more importantly, gets a nod approval from her husband, Mohan, Jaya states :

Seeta had been the means through which I had shut the door firmly on all these women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention. Women I had known I could not write about; because they might, it was just possible, resemble Mohan's mother or aunt or my mother or aunt.¹³

The statemnet effectively conveys the fact that women writers have all along abstained from telling the truth, giving greater credence to their roles as wives than to themselves as individuals. Here Kamat, as a hard critic says Jaya that she has capability of writing better stuff. He frankly tells her : "I can never imagine you writing this. This you, I mean. I can see the woman who writes this. She's plump, good humoured, pea brained, but shrewd, devious skimming over life." (149) As Adele King observes : "In a self referential parody, Deshpande makes Jaya a writer of women's magazine fiction. In Jaya stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life. Also, the mixture of surrealism and fantasy in some of the

¹³. Ibid, p. 13.

experiences the writer undergoes is an important aspect of the making and unmaking of fiction in that long silence."¹⁴

Jaya's relationship with Kamat, which is never very precisely defined in the novel, is also an escapade to find some human empathy and sharing. This relationship imparts an inner fulfilment to Jaya which her relationship with Mohan alone had failed to provide. Rashmi Gaur remarks that "The motives and needs of human beings are considered as arranged in a hierarchy, in order of potency to the unsatisfied organism. The hierarchy has several levels. At the first level, the physiological needs are the most basic aspects of human motivation and action. At the second level, the motives pertaining to the organisms, desire for a stable, secure environment become important. At the next level in the hierarchy, love and belonging are the motives for having friends, companions, family and identification with a group or individual. These needs involve affiliation and friendship, and as they are satisfied, self-esteem motives become important, involving the desire for respect, confidence, and admiration."¹⁵ Later we see that Jaya's identification with Kamat comes in this category. Her association with Kamat, who is a widower and lives in an apartment above Jaya's flat at Dadar. He is a lovely

¹⁴. Adele King, "Shashi Deshpande : Portraits of an Indian Woman," *The New Indian Novel in English : A Study of the 1980s*, edited by Vinay Kripal, New Delhi : Allied Books, 1990, p. 166.

¹⁵. Ibid : p. 94.

man and showers his attention on Jaya. He is a totally unlike most other men Jaya has known in the sense that he has no reservations about doing things like cooking which are usually considered to be a woman's domain. She feels totally at ease in his company because he treats her as an equal. In his company, she rids herself of all her inhibitions and opens up to him all her problem. He, however, refuses to let her wallow in her self pity. Instead, he analyses situations objectively and rationally without offering her the luxury of burrowing in false sympathy. He is an advertiser by profession and is apparently well read. He is able to offer constructive criticism to Jaya with regard to her writing he understands her fears and even volunteers to receive her mail at his address, so that she could avoid a confrontation with her husband who disapproves of her writing.

The initial platonic nature of their relationship develops into physical attraction in course of time. She is more uninhibited in his company than in that of her husband. Her relationship with him can not be placed into a particular category. At one moment he chides her like a father and the next moment he compliments her like a lover. He makes some personal remarks which are not usually made by men to women who are not their wives or lovers. For instance, he says : "I prefer clean, spare lives in a human being. You, for example - your name is like your face." (152) Once in a particularly emotional moment when she recalls her father's death, she finds herself in his arms as he attempts to console her. She responds to his touch and comes close to

surrendering her body. Later, recounting the experience she thinks: "There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so." (157) But at the same time she fears and tries to remain 'Jaya' Jaya feels that her nearness with Kamat troubles Mohan. Jaya herself says "It had annihilated Mohan entirely, it had frightened me the way it had annihilated Mohan entirely." (157)

In spite of the willingness of her body and the ample opportunity provided in the seclusions of his apartment. Jaya overcomes her yearning in the interest of safeguarding her marriage. The man woman relationship, going by the norms of society, is dictated by deceit and treachery. Human beings, more often than not, prefer to go by the dictates of society rather than be truthful to themselves as individuals. Appearances have to be maintained at any cost. It is, perhaps, this which prompts Jaya to behave in an utterly callous way on the death of Kamat. On one of her visits to his room, Jaya finds Kamat lying dead on the floor of his flat. She is unable to pay homage to her friend for the fear of getting involved in any scandal which might endanger her marriage. A terrible feeling of guilt envelops her, but she remains helplessly passive. According to Sarla Pakar, "She perhaps does her role of wife to perfection, but fails as a human being"¹⁶ Y.S. Sunita

¹⁶. Sarla Pakar, " Breakig the Silence Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence," *Indian Women Novelist*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1991, Set-I vol. V, p. 166.

Reddy aptly remarks that "Through this incident, Shashi Deshpande highlights the plight of the so-called educated women still bound firmly by the shackles of tradition and convention."¹⁷

Next in the novel we see that Jaya's creative writing and her close association with Kamat helps her to search her own identity. In her anxiety to perform her role as a perfect wife and a loving and caring mother, her identity is relegated to the background. Her name 'Jaya' which is given to her at birth is changed to 'Suhasini' at the time of marriage. To please her husband, she transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman. She cuts her hair, wears dark glasses and ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family fold that from a fiercely independent woman she is transformed into the "stereotype" of a woman : nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support?

Throughout in the novel Jaya has always tried to prove as a traditional and mythological wife. Her relationship with Mohan can be understood in these following lines from the text:

The thought of living without him had twisted my insides,
his death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The
very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that

¹⁷. Ibid, p. 77.

tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been little late coming home. I had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned, I had my imagination shaped my life to a desolate widowhood.¹⁸

But Mohan after being caught in a forgery and joining his Dadar flat became cruel to Jaya. Jaya bears all his hurting being a true Indian wife. She is silent and not replying looking up to her husband as a 'sheltering tree'. As time passes we notice there is change in the behaviour of Mohan. He says : "Do you think I haven't seen how changed you are since we came here, since I told you about my situation." (12) A hysterical Jaya bursts out laughing at this outburst from Mohan. This is the last straw for Mohan who leaves the house in a huff in a seemingly permanent way. His absence unnerves her and she thinks her world will fall apart.

At the same time Jaya gets the news that her son Rahul, who had been holidaying with their family friends, has suddenly disappeared. This adds to her despair more and shatters her tender heart. Later Rahul returns and she receives a telegram from Mohan that 'All is well.' Before this happens, however she lives for several days in a traumatic state. Her thoughts go back and forth in time, triggered by the slightest provocation in the present. There is no one

¹⁸. Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, op. cit, pp. 96-97.

she can turn to in her despair. She struggles alone with trauma though it upsets her mental equilibrium, she emerges victorious when she finally comes out of her emotional upheaval, she comes to terms with herself and her position. For the two nights before the return of her son and husband that she has to herself in the Dadar flat, she pours out her innermost thoughts, giving vent to her pent up feelings, her fears, her doubts and everything she had suppressed in her seventeen years of silence. The following lines can help here:

By permitting her story, she had achieved articulation of her predicament, her constraints, her anguish and has thereby broken her silence.¹⁹

Now, her role of a passive wife ends. The novel that is finally written by Jaya contains not only her story and that of her husband and children but numerous other characters, mostly Kusum, her mad cousin, Mohan's mother and many other victims. Jaya defines her cousin, Kusum, a deserted wife, negatively. Since she had always been paired with Kusum in her parental home at Ambegaon, Jaya defines herself as not Kusum; "But Kusum was nuts, thank god, Kusum, you are nuts, I had thought complacently, because you are nuts, I know I am sane." (126).

¹⁹. Ibid, p. 155.

Jaya keeps the insane Kusum at home and takes care of her in spite of strong objections from her mother and brothers. After recovering a bit, she is taken home by her brother Dilip. She, however, commits suicide a day before her husband is supposed to take her home. In a letter informing Jaya of the death, her mother writes : "But it was a good thing in a way. She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her." (22).

Later Jaya writes the story of Mohan's mother that told by Mohan and his sister Vimala. Mohan's mother was a professional cook who earned money cooking for wedding feasts. She used to get beaten up by her husband frequently. The husband would come late, usually after a drinking bout but the rice had to be served steaming hot to him from a vessel which had not been touched by anyone else. Mohan's mother, of course, would eat after him. Mohan tells Jaya about one incident when his father returned home late one night to find that there was no *chutney* to eat along with his rice. He flung the plate against the wall and walked off. Mohan's mother sent him to the neighbour's house to borrow chillies, prepared *chutney* and fresh rice and waited huddled near the fireside until her husband returned at midnight. Relating the story years later to Jaya, Mohan exclaims, "God, she was tough, women, in those days were tough," (36) The death of Mohan's mother was described by his sister Vimala to her sister in law. That "... with her eyes caved in she looked like a dead

person, her face was the face of a dead women. A week later she died. She went to a mid wife and tried to get herself aborted. (38).

Next we find the story of Jeeja, Jaya's maid servant. She is an oppressed woman. She is battered about by her good for nothing drunken husband. Without a Murmur of protest, she supports him and even provides him liquor with her hard earned money. She bears no grudge against him. even when he takes up another woman. She justifies it by saying, "God didn't give us any children. That was his misfortune as well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying again when I could n't give him any children?" (52) After the death of her husband and his mistress, she willingly brings up their son, Rajaram, who is a chip of the old block. He drinks and beats up his wife Tara. Jeeja, however, does not allow Tara to even abuse or curse her husband.

There is also the character of Jaya's grand mother, Ajji, in the novel. Ajji, who, once widowed, takes to an empty room, never to emerge again and that of Mukta and Vanita Mami. Mukta is Jaya's immediate neighbour at her Dadar flat. She is widowed at a young age and lives with her parents and a rebellious daughter Nilima. She is the sort, who will go out of the way to help people. She is deeply pious and Jaya cannot help but wonder at the utter uselessness of such self-torture, "If it wasn't 'her Saturday' it was 'her Monday' or 'her Thursday'. Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could

eat a normal meal. Her self-Mortification seemed to be the most positive thing about her. And yet her piety-surely it was that which prompted those fasts-seemed meaningless, since she had already forfeited the purpose of it, the purpose of all Hindu women's fasts - the avoidance of widowhood." (67).

Jaya's baren Vanita Mami too would perform numerous *Puja* and fasts in the hope of being blessed with a child, "but she had gone on with her fasts, her ritual circumstances of the *Tulsi* plant, of the *Peepal* tree, even when their aim had gone beyond her reach, when her uterus had shrivelled and her ovaries atrophied.'

Thus, we see that this novel is the story of Jaya and her writing various stories in it. At the end of the novel, Jaya very honestly questions herself : "But why am I making myself the heroine of this story? Why do I presume that the understanding is mine alone." (193) The novel ends with a resurgence of faith. Jaya's decision to erase the silence which had defined and distorted her communication with her husband should be interpreted as the harbinger of a new hope. Sarabjit K. Sandhu aptly remarks :

In the novel, Desphande has presented not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in

order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like that of a bird who has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not. In the same way, Jaya is aware of her abilities and she knows that she can expose them openly, but somehow, she does not. She always remains silent which indicates that the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all the newly-acquired professional roles.²⁰

In a great measure, the image of woman (Jaya) as portrayed in *That Long Silence* resembles that of Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*. *That Long Silence* once again lays stress on the mute message of million of married Indian women, their courageous struggle and aspiration for total autonomy and ultimate meek submission to their husbands. The image of woman in this novel would have been refreshingly different, if Deshpande had not depicted Jaya's unfortunate ultimate submission to her husband and also the novel would have gained in aesthetic effectiveness.

²⁰. Ibid, p. 43.

The Binding Vine

The Binding Vine, (1993), is the sixth significant novel penned by Shashi Deshpande. This novel marks a notable departure from all the preceding and succeeding novels of Deshpande. In her novels Deshpande has tried to raise different questions relating to the feminine world and answer them in her own way. In the present novel *The Binding Vine* she describes the problem of Urmila called Urmi and other characters in the same way as in the rest of her novels she has described various characters and their problems. She describes Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya in *That Long Silence*. These earlier protagonists of Deshpande seek their own salvation. The novel contains a lot of thrill and suspense. The narrator, a clever and sharp-tongued woman called Urmi (or Urmila), is seen grieving over the untimely death of her young daughter Anu. Her sailor—husband lives for off, and is a rude and rough person. The narrator does not want to die in any situation; instead, she says, “..... I would feel life tingling through me. I was alive, I could not be dead. I would never know what it felt like to be dead” (20) Urmi busies herself for a while in the poetry of her long-dead mother-in-law, Mira, whose poetry, like her life, was full of pity, rage and anguish (67). Mira bled to death after her child, Kishore (Urmi's husband), was born (136). The heart-rending story of Mira runs parallel to the equally, or even more, disgusting story of

Kalpana, a young and beautiful girl hanging between life and death, scuttling between home and hospital. Kalpana is a victim of rape and torture, and her helpless mother, Shakuntala (or Sakutai), is terribly upset and shocked over the cruel incident. Commenting on the deteriorating condition of Kalpana, the narrator says :

".....I notice how the contours of her face have changed, the bones pushing themselves against the parchment-like skin. There is a kind of deathly stillness about the body, the face almost a mask in its rigidity."¹

Sakutai wants her own death as well as that of her daughter (177). The 'binding vines' for Urmi are her sons, Kartik and her mother Inni; for Akka it is Bhaskar; for Sakutai, her daughter Sandhya and her sister Sulu; and for Vanna, her man Harish. In the course of the story, however, Sakutai's kind and loving sister ends up her life by setting herself aflame after sprinkling" a whole bottle of kerosene" (180). Some how Sulu comes to know that her own husband has wrecked the life of Kalpana to satiate his wolfish desires, and she is left with no option but an optimistic note, and in the midst of deaths, rapes, and tortures, the narrator is seen searching for "the spring of life" (203). Basavaraj Naikar aptly remarks that "In *The Binding Vine* is shown the perennial truth of how all the human beings in life—parents and children, relatives and strangers, men and women

¹. Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, Delhi : Penguin India, 1992, p-109.

are bound by the vine of emotional attachment and struggle to enjoy the beauty of life and overcome the ugliness in various ways"²

The novel opens with Urmila, called Urmi trying to cope with the death of her daughter and the efforts of her friend and sister-in-law, Vanna, her brother Amrut and Inni, her mother to help her back to normalcy. Remembering her face Urmi says- "Her face is admiring and wistful and it reminds me of the child Vanna, saying to me the first time I took her home, 'you live here'. In this house ?" (9). Urmi is unable to forget her one-year old daughter because her memories haunt her. She fights with the memories but also realizes that forgetting is betrayal: "I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray". (21) Vanna's pathetic attempts to remind Urmi of the great courage she had displayed in the incidents of their childhood are all dismissed by Urmi who feels that they are too petty to be compared to her grief now. She, in fact, wants to cling on to her grief and feels that she cannot betray her daughter's memory by trying to blot her out of her mind. In the mean time she also realizes her responsibility to her living son Kartik who needs her love and watches her anxiously. It is not that she talks every death of her kith and kin in this way. When

2. Basavaraj Naikar, "Joys and Sorrows of womanhood in *The Binding Vine*", *Women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi, Khosla Publishing House: 2001, p. 122.

her father died, she could bear the shock easily. She says : "Papa is only a memory a gentle memory" (27), But Annu is different.

It is in this state that Urmi meets Shakuntala called Sakutai, the mother of a rape-victim, Kalpana on her visit to a hospital where Vana works. Earlier the mother assumes that her daughter, who is now lying unconscious, has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor informs her that she has been raped, in the process of which she is so badly injured that she is like a vegetable neither dead nor alive. In the novel it is described something like this, "Her daughter's been admitted with a head injury. An accident. Bhasker says she was raped as well.

'My God' !

The doctor comes in a glass of water in his hand, the water slopping over at each step.

'Fainted ? ' He holds the woman's wrist, feeling her pulse." (57) The mother's reaction to this news is quit predictable. She tells Vanna hysterically, "It is not true, you people are trying to blackmail my daughter's name". (58) Later on, catching a hint of the conversation between Vanna and Dr. Bhaskar, doctor in charge, she recoils in fear against the word 'report'. She cries :

No, no, no. Tell him, tai, it's not true don't tell anyone. I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we are decent people, doctor", she turns to him, "don't tell the police". During a conversation with Urmi,

Sakutai, the uneducated dependent mother of Kalpana, the girl who was raped also asks her how many children she has. As we know that Urmi has lost a daughter and has a son left. She feels guilty when she mentions that she has only a son because she is angry with male beings after rape victim. She gives an analysis of society's attitude towards victims of rape. She says: "If a girl's honour is lost, what is felt? The girl does not have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her."³

The narrator highlights her immediate concern here which is that the rape should remain secret. Mrinalini Sebastian says it that "basically it is the story of Urmila, 'the clever sharp-tongued' woman grieving over the death of her baby daughter and surrounded by, but rebuffing, the care of her mother and her childhood friend Vanna. Instead, she becomes caught up in the discovery of her long dead mother-in-law's poetry, written when she was a young woman subjected to rape in her marriage; and in Kalpana, a young woman having between life and death in a hospital ward, also the victim of rape. Yet in this web of loss and despair are the glimmerings of hope. Shashi Deshpande explores with acuity and compassion the redemptive powers of love".⁴ As the story proceeds we notice that when Inni wants to have a framed

³. Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op.cit. p.p.58-59.

⁴. Mrinalini Sebastian, "Loveliness of the Gendered Subject Looking for the Subaltern in *The Binding Vine*" *The Enterprise of Reading Differently; The novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial arguments*, New Delhi, Prestige Books, 2000. p. 157.

photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly : "I don't need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture ?" (68) But when her friend Lalita asks how many kids she has, she replies, "Only one. A son". And soon she realizes that she has done injustice to Anu : "Only one, son.... the words keep hammering in my mind. How could I ? Oh God, how could I ? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu ?.... only one son..... how could I !" (106) Y. S. Sunita Reddy remarks that "In writing about rape, Deshpande has not attempted anything new but the way she has portrayed this sordid drama is very realistic. The characters spring to life and the anger, frustration, helplessness and despair of the victim's family are brought out evocatively"⁵ The narrator of the story, Urmi, accompanies the sobbing Sakutai to her house on Vana's request and from here begins their association. Urmi visits her regularly to inquire after her daughter and through their conversation we get a glean of Kalpana's life. While speaking of her daughter, Sakutai is full of paradoxes. One one hand she says :

She is very smart, that is how she got the job in the shop. Kalpana even learnt how to speak English. People in our chawl used to laugh at her but she did not care. When she wants something, she goes after it, nothing can stop her.

⁵. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "Coming to Terms with Tragedy : The Binding Vine", *A Feminist Perspective on the novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001 p. 91-92.

She is stubborn, you can't imagine how stubborn she is.⁶

A little later, she continues, however, pride giving way to resentment:

And she is secretive. She never tells me anything. She did not even tell me how much her pay was, can you imagine that ? Me, her own mother. As if I was going to take her money away from her. I don't want, anything. All I ask is that she help me out.⁷

On another occasion, Sakutai bursts out :

She is very pretty, my Kalpana. She's not like me at all. When she was born, she was so dilicate and fair, just like a doll, I wondered how a woman like me could have a daughter like that.⁸

Earlier Sakutai's love and affection for Kalpana was not so deep and intense. She condemns her for the very things for which she had praised her earlier :

And I have to listen to such words because of this girl. She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me—what could I do ? She was so self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are

⁶ Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op. cit. p. 92.

⁷ Ibid : p. 92

⁸ Ibid : p. 93

like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody.

It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault.⁹

But Urmila, is unable to see the point in blaming Kalpana. She is outraged that the rapist will be allowed to get away scot free, if the case is not registered as a rape. She tries reason with Sakutai :

She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she did not do anything wrong. Why can't you see that ? Are you blind ? It is not her fault, no not her fault at all"¹⁰

She is unable to convince Sakutai, who keeps saying, "But sometimes, I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is dead". (147) Vikas Malik says that "Sakutai is a victim of her own values. Yet she was not born with these values embedded within her mother's womb. Some one had to shape these values, make her believe that they were her own. Who ? Her mother, her mother's mother, her mother's mother's mother ? Not at all. It was her father, her father's father, her father's father's father, adnauseam".¹¹

Here we can see that Sakutai's reaction, no doubt, is a reflection of the society we live in governed by age-old patriarchal norms. She has fear of society and her family honour. Y.S. Sunita Reddy says, that

⁹. Ibid : p. 14.

¹⁰. Ibid : p. 147.

¹¹. Vikas Malik., "My son you rape some Girls- But Marry a nice Girl", (Review of the Binding Vine), *Asian Times*, No. 29, June : 1993, p. 9.

"There is a strict code of conduct to be followed by girls regarding their dress, speech and behaviour in order not to attract the attention of men. A girl is advised at every step to avoid behaving like a male and to establish her feminine identity. A lot of importance is attached to the way she carries herself, the way she sits, stands, taks and interacts with others..... If a girl is raped, then, according to the rules laid down by society, she is considered to be as much at fault as the rapist, if not more. Perhaps, there can be no greater injustice heaped on woman than this"¹²

After Kalpana's rape the police who is on duty declares it an accident case. Dr. Bhasker, the doctor in charge of the case, protests in outrage at the case being reported as an accident. Pointing out to the obvious sings of rape on the badly mauld Kalpana, he tells Urmi :

What about the injuries, I asked him ? I'd examined the girl damn it." Bhaskar says angrily. "You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusion on her thighs— he must have pinned her down with his knes. And her lips bitten and chewed. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks ? The man laughed at that, he had the sense to give in Okay, he said,

¹². Ibid : p. 93-94.

she was raped.¹³

Shakutai comments that the police officer needs to be convinced that it is a rape case. As he tells Dr. Bhaskher :

She is going to die anyway, what difference does it make whether on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape. We don't like rape cases— They are messy and troublesome, never straight forward. But forget that and think of the girl and her family. Do you think it will do them any good to have it known the girl was raped ? She's unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared.¹⁴

Here Kalpana's mother Sakutai seems to be more worried about the scandal which would certainly ruin the family's name and impair the marriage prospects of not only Kalpana but also her second daughter, Sandhya.

As time passes Dr. Bhaskar finds it strange that women like Sakutai who got nothing out of marriage except children, still live in fear of their remaining unmarried. He is informed by Vanna that Sakutai's husband had deserted her long ago for another woman and left her alone to fend herself and the children. Hence he thinks it is a mystery that Sakauti should hanker after the marriage of her children

¹³. Shashi Deshpande, **The Binding Vine**, op. cit. p. 88.

¹⁴. Loc. cit.

when it had given her little comfort or happiness herself. As he tells Urmi :

Women are astonishing, I think it takes a hell of a lot of courage for a woman like that to even think of marriage ¹⁵

Urmi replies that woman marry in spite of everything because it provides security. But the noted Indian English writer, Mulk Raj Anand feels something different :

No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male young into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust. ¹⁶

In spite of all her sympathies, Urmi is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authorities decide to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmi then decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may get justice. Urmi's crusade for Kalpana does not revive the approval of either Vanna or Urmi's mother. Nevertheless, Urmi pursues the case. Eventually, the case is reopened and the

¹⁵. Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op cit. p.-87.

¹⁶. Mulk Raj Anand, "In Yama' Hill", *Between Spaces of silence— women creative writers*, edited by Kamini Denish, New: Delhi Sterling Publication, 1994. p. 33.

identity of the rapist is revealed only in the end. However, a perpetuation of the tragedy can not be avoided as the case draws to a close. The rapist is discovered to be Sakutai's sister Sulu's husband, who, it is later revealed, had always lusted after Kalpana. This revelation shatter Sulu who immolates herself in guilty despair, leaving behind her grief-stricken sister, Sakutai, who had adored her. If we consider Deshpande's other novel like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, we will find that in this novel also she has written the same subject Sarita is assaulted at night by her husband, who vent his frustration on her as she becomes a successful doctor while he remains and underpaid lecturer. In the *The Binding Vine*, however, Deshpande discribes the obsession of a man with his wife and her intense dislike for physical intimacy with him, which finds voice in a series of poems discovered by the protagonist Urmi long after her death.

Many years after her marriage, Urmi is given an old trunk full of books and other odds and ends belonging to her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, by her husband's step mother, who is refferd to as Akka. The trunk from which she gets the photograph contains many books and diaries of Mira. Akka is also the mother of her friend, Vanna, while handing over the trunk to her, Akka tells her how Urmi's father-in-law had been attracted to Mira, a college student, and how he had pursued and married her. Persuing the voluminous pile of writing left behind by the young Mira, Urmi fathoms the extent of forced sexual activity. Mira was subjected to by her husband. The trunk is full of

school note to by her husband. The trunk is full of school note books which Mira has used as diaries, scribbling pads, untidy bundles of paper, a file and an envelope full of photographs. The poems of Mira are in Kannada and the diaries in English, Reading through the cryptic poems and entries in her diary, Urmi is able to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl is able to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl who was condemned to suffer in an incompatible marriage. After a careful study she is able to decipher the essence of the thoughts which Mira had, perhaps, tried to put down on paper. From the book of poems presented to Mira by her father, it is evident to Urmi that her father was proud of her talent. Mira's photographs and writings resurrect in Urmi's mind an image of vivacious and intelligent young girl. Her desire to be a poet and her inhibition about expressing it aloud, her fear of being laughed at, are all obvious in her poems :

Huddled in my Cocoon, a somnolent silkworm. Will I
emerge a beautiful being ?

Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist ! (65)

Here we see that her innermost feelings find expression in her poems written in the vernacular, Kannada.

The story of Mira is perhaps the story of countless women who face the same situation but are unable to voice their suffering. Y.S. Sunita Reddy has aptly said, that "A husband imposing himself on his wife is, however, never publicised at least among the Indian where the

Purans dictate that it is a wife's duty to please her husband in bed. Traditions demands that a perfect wife should possess the following qualities.

Karyesi Dasi

Karyeshu Mautri

Roopecha Laxmi

Kshmaya Daridri

Bhuktesu Mata

Shayanesu Veshya

Shatkarma Yukta

Kuladharma Patni

Loosely translated, these lines mean that a wife should serve her husband like a slave, give him proper advice, look as beautiful as the goddess Laxmi, forgive all his sins, however terrible they may be, feed him like a mother, and serve him like a prostitute in bed."¹⁷

It can be a major reason that Urmi's mother-in-law Mira, had to put up in silence with the violation of her body. Her thoughts are recorded as poems for posterity. Urmi's careful translation of the Kannada poems into English reveals the pathetic condition of Mira. Here is an example of a poem :

¹⁷. Ibid : p.p. 97-98.

But tell me friend,
did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels
round her finger and tremble,
fearing the coming of the dark - clouded
engulfing night.¹⁸

Going through Mira's diary, Urmi is convinced that she had written from her personal experience. "She observes that it runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion for the man she married". (63) Wendy Martin says it that "This shows that a woman loses her identity after her marriage. She is seen either as a wife or mother which in a way erases her real self and imposes another alien self on her. The difference made by Akka symbolizes that the poem and diaries are "self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men."¹⁹

After reading the poems, Urmi realizes the suffering of Mira that she had shared with her husband. In the novel we read that "Mira wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty two". (48) She expresses her feelings

¹⁸. Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op.cit. p. 66.

¹⁹. Wendy Martin, "*The Female Mystique in American Fiction*", *Female Studies, II*, edited by Howe, P. 83; qtd. Veena Noble Das, "*Feminsm in and Literature*," *The commonwealth Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1 1994-95, p. 10.

Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something, why don't you speak to me ? What shall I talk about. I ask him stupidly, "What did you do today, where did you go, what have you been thinking about all evening ?" and so he goes on, dragging my day, my whole self out of me. But I have my defences: I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I am doing and he gets angry with me. I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins, " Please", he says, "Please I love you". And over and over agains until he has done. "I love you", Love : How I hate the word. If this is love, it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say "no" at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me ? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me ? Why does it have to be me ? Why does it have to be me ? Why can't be leave me alone?²⁰

Such passages show the psychological fears and physical suffering of Mira. Urmi Wants to share this suffering with Vanna, her friend from childhood and now her sister-in-law, but she can not,

²⁰. Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op cit. p. 67.

because "I can not speak of Mira, of Mira's writing, to her", (83) This is another reason of silence between them. She also adds that one can never see one's parents as a sexual being. In the entire novel we see that Urmi feels the same pain and anguish as that of Sakutai. Seeing their pain and anguish Y.S. Sunita Reddy has favoured them something like this : "Since the beginning of time, it had always been taken for granted that marriage provided a means for man to satisfy his sexual urge and to help in the task of protection and that woman was only a tool to be used towards that end"²¹ in the same connection Reddy also adds that Deshpande's Mira represent women who are victim of Marital rape.

Later on the photographs of Shakutai's mother-in-law Mira introduces that she is "Kishore's mother, Kartika's grand mother." (42) She sees a group photographs of Mira and from the formality of the picture, she conjectures that it was taken to mark "an occasion—Mira's wedding perhaps—a parting of ways for a group of friends, the end of a chapter", (43) Inquisitive to know more about her, she asks Akka about her. Akka tells her that her brother saw Mira at a wedding and fell in love with her. Since then he had" single-minded pursuit of an object : ;Marrying Mira. (47). He was suggested as a good match for Mira and in this way the marriage was arranged. She died while giving birth to Kishore.

Next Urmi notices the difference in handing over of Mira's

²¹. Ibid. p. 99.

property to her. When Akka hands over little bits of Mira's jewellery, She says, "They are Kishore's mother's I kept them for his wife." But when she hands over the books and diaries of Mira, she says, "Take this, it's Mira's She did not mention Kishore at all, as if she was now directly linking me with Mira"(48).

After reading the poem's, Urmi realizes the suffering of Mira, "the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty-two." (48) Urmi also feels that Mira's diary" is not a daily account of her routine life but a communion with herself" (51) For the time-being she forgets her own suffering and tries to probe into Mira's poetry to visualize the kind of troubled life she has lived. Urmi remembers the poem behind which lies the man "who tries to possess another human being against her will"(83).

Don't tread paths barred to you

Obey, never utter a 'no';

Submit and your life will be

a paradise, she said and blessed me.²²

She also notice from her diary that Mira, who is bound in a marriage against her choice, cringes further when a new name 'Nirmala' is thrust on her. But she refuses to give up her name and

²². Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, op. cit. p. 83.

proclaims :

Nirmala, they call, I stand statue still.

Do you build the new without razing the old ?

A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold

Can they make me Nirmala ? I am Mira.²³

Urmi decodes Mira's loneliness from the fact that the letter rarely mentions her family in her poems. This loneliness was a part of her being.

Urmi feels the burden of the dead on her. She had taken several things of the dead-Bai Aji's silver pins, her saris and Mira's bangles—but none of these meant much to her. Confronted with these, Mira's poetry is 'Like a message being tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell.' (115) Urmi visualizes the moments when and where Mira could have written the poems. Certainly she did not possess a room of her own. Urmi says : " I can see her stealthily, soundlessly by getting out of bed, sitting down on the floor by the window perhaps, forgetting everything while she wrote." (127)

In her diary Mira also mentions her meeting with the rising poet. venkatesh who later became a grand old man of Indian literature. When Mira gave him some of her poems to read, he said, "Why do you need to write poetry ? It is enough for a young woman like you to give

²³. Ibid : p. 161.

birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men." (127). This is also a kind of brutality because "even of force your will upon another is to be brutal".(133). This brutality is very appropriately described by Mulk Raj Anand in such away, " This reflects the agony of a creative woman in an androcentric world. It connotes "the handicaps of women writers in a male chauvinist society"²⁴. After this incident there is a sudden change in Mira's writing and she starts to use her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house of her husband. This is the reason that Urmi takes so interest in reading Mira's poems. She reads it as a hunter to find out the real self of Mira.

The poems of Mira haunt her so much that she decides to resurrect her by publishing them. But when Vanna comes to know about this plan, she is enraged. She feels that Urmi is a traitor who will destroy the honour of the family by publishing the poem. "It is as if the knowledge of what her father did, of what he was, has threatened something, disturbed the inner rhythm of her being, so that there is a sense of disharmony about her", (181).

Urmi shares the anguish of not only her mother-in-law but also Kalpana—a girl who becomes a prey to her own relative who molests her. When her mother Sakutai approaches Urmi and Vanna who is a medical social worker, the later tells her that Kalpana has been

²⁴. Ibid: p. 2.

wronged by someone. She has also undergone severe head injury and is on the verge of death. Her mother requests the doctor not to inform the police: She further requests Urmi, "to tell him (the doctor) not to make the report" (62) Urmi surprised to see Sakutai whose husband has already deserted her for some other younger woman, worried about the marriage of Kalpana who is, in the words of the doctor, "neither dead nor alive". (86) But she soon realizes that women like Kalpana's mother find security in marriage. At last they are "safe from other men".(88)

As mother Sakutai was afraid of the boys of her Chawl because they behaved "like dogs panting after bitches". (146) She had even thought of marrying Kalpana to Sulu's husband Prabhakar who was "mad" after her. Kalpana outrightly rejected the offer and ridiculed Sulu. When she decided to marry a boy of her own liking she was raped by Prabhakar. It is significant to note that Sulu was compelled by her husband to make such a proposal. When Sulu knows that her own husband has molested Kalpana, she finishes her cooking, gives breakfast to her husband and then commits suicide because she wants to avoid telling a lie to save her husband from the police.

Thus we see that Urmi is accused of being a "traitor" to Mira and Kalpana, she is resolute to break the silence of women which comes in different forms—sometimes in the name of the social taboos, sometimes in the name of the family honour.

The marriage of Akka is also unfair. In the novel she is made to marry a widower and the father of a child. Even before her marriage, she is warned that her prospective husband had been obsessed with his wife and after her death is now interested only in his son. In fact, he marries so that his son can have a mother. Listening to Akka's narrating the story to her and Vanna, Urmi thinks : "The cruelty, the enormous cruelty of silenced us". (47) And finally Akka willingly agrees to marry Kishore's father in spite of the risk of living under the shadow of a dead woman.

In the entire novel we have an other marriage also like Sakutai and Sulu. Sakutai's husband leaves her in her father's home soon after their marriage so that he can search for livelihood in Bombay. When he does not return six months later, however, Sakuti joins him in Bombay, unable to stay any longer in her father's house. She realises that her husband is a lazy and good for nothing fellow who does not stick to a job. They live in a relation's house where she is put through much humiliation. After the birth of three children one after the other, Sakutai takes it upon herself to work and support her family. In spite of doing all kinds of work to support her family, her husband deserts her for another woman. Sakutai does not hesitate to describe her husband as a useless fellow. Talking to Urmi of her unfulfilled desire to have a *mangalsutra* made in gold she says, " Then one day I thought — the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold ? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life, Urmila, marrying that man." (110) It is, indeed,

tragic that is spite of putting up with such a worthless husband and in spite of struggling alone to fend for her children, fingers are pointed at her when anything goes wrong, in the family as in the case when Kalpana is raped. As she tells Urmi; bitterly in one of her conversations: "What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband ? Imagine ! He left me for another woman, left me with these children to bring up." (147).

The condition of Sakutai's sister Sulu, is no better than her. In the case of marriage Sakutai helps Sulu in every way she can, and tries to take over the responsibility of bringing up Kalpana which is, however, thwarted by Kalpana herself. As we learn later, she is lusted after by Prabhakar, Suli's husband. In her many talks with Urmi, Sakutai describes what a wonderful person her sister is and how well she kept her home, how beautifully she had decorated her sister's house for a Haldi-Kumkum ceremony. All these attributes, unfortunately, do not find favour with her husband. And she lives a deserted life.

In this novel, we learn the tragic stories of Urmila, Sakutai and Mira. Basavaraj Naikar aptly remarks that, "Urmila happens to be a sensitive woman rather than a radical feminist and can be taken to be a mouthpiece of the novelist. She deserves consolation for herself from extending sympathy of similar women like Sakutai and Mira whose frustration is perhaps greater than her own."²⁵ He also remarks that

²⁵. Basavaraj Nair, "Joys and Sorrows of Womanhood in The Binding Vine",

"In spite of the difficulties and obstacles caused by the patriarchal society, these three women endeavour to channelize their emotions in different ways because of their strong urge to survive. Having entered a *Chakarvyuha* from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their given life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life."²⁶

This novel, thus presents different images of women—woman as sensitive suffering person, woman as a victim of rape and woman as a cold person unaffected by her sister's rape at the hands of her own husband. All the women character- Urmi, Mira, Sakutai, Kalpana and Nirmala— face the realities of life in their own ways. The images of women, as presented in this novel, are not only realistic but also immensely interesting.

Women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande, op. cit. p. 125.

²⁶. Loc Cit.

A Matter of Time

A Matter of Time (1996), is the seventh novel of Shashi Deshpande. In this novel, it is for the first time that Deshpande makes an effort to highlight a male protagonist in her fictional career. Y.S. Sunita Reddy aptly remarks that "Shashi Deshpande, who has earned a niche for herself in articulating the bitterness and disolation of her women characters in her novels, enters for the first time into a broader arena and grapples with the complex theme of alienation in her novel, *A Matter of Time* ." ¹ The novel revolves around an urban, middle-class family of Gopal - a university history teacher. As the rest of her novels are based on middle-class family relationship so is this one also. Shashi Deshpande herself says:

Undoubtedly my novels are all about family relationships. But... I go beyond that because the relationships which exist within the family are, to an extent parallel to the relationships which exist between human beings outside... when I am writing about the family, it is not just about the family. It definitely does not limit my canvas. On the contrary that she is where everything begins." ²

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1. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "Marriage is not for Everyone" : *A Matter of Time, A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi Prestige Books, 2001, p. 111.
 2. Geetha Gangadharan, "Denying the attuness" (Interview), *Indian*

The novel opens with a three generations of women. The first generation's representative is Kalyani, the grand mother; the second generation's is Sumitra called Sumi; and the third is represented by Arundhati, the daughter of Sumi called Aru. But, ironically, it is Gopal, Sumi's husband, who emerges to be a more fully realized character than any of these women in the novel. This is the story of their pains, endurance, suffering and love, understanding and support extended to one another. Sumi and Gopal had love marriage and now have three young daughters - Aru, Charu and Seema. At the opening of the novel, Gopal enters house and tells Sumi that he is leaving the house - called Vishwas. Sumi does not know what to say and "he goes out as quietly as she had come in." (9) As she was watching the movie, continues to watch until the end, when the clown, tragic, doomed victim, dies. She goes to bed with song still going on in head, the slightly off-key voice of Mukesh singing "Jena yahan, Marna yahan", the nimble feet of the clown dancing to its tune. Hearing the song she feels that, "as if this is all there at present to trouble her, her mind puzzles over the meaning of the words" : "What do they mean?" Her mind slides from one interpretation to another, over and over again, until in sheer exhaustion she falls asleep. She gets up at three in the morning and finds herself alone in bed, the pillow by her side cold and smooth the other half of the bed. Finally she finds out that, "it is true what Gopal, told her, he meant it, he has already done it."(9)

Having reached this conclusion, she lies still, waiting for the dawn. Now, her mind is crystal like clear, she knows what has happened. Next morning she gets out of bed, wash, make tea for all of them and go into her daughter's room to tell them what has happened, "She tells them about it almost exactly repeating Gopal's words, leaving out nothing". (9) In the words of R.S. Pathak, "Sumi appears to be an epitome of silent suffering and passive resistance. But, the novelist feels, she is made of different stuff. "She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself, she more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity, she would do anything for pride. "She distances even her husband."³

Sumi, though immensely hurt by Gopal's act, endures the pain within herself and tries to keep the things normal for her daughters. And yet "Sumi, despite her facade of normality, has a quality about her — a kind of blankness — that makes them uneasy." (10-11) Her two older daughters feel that they should do something, but they do not know what it is they can do. They are waiting for a lead from their mother, but she gives them none.

Next morning Shripati, Sumi's father, takes them to 'Big House', her parental home. Kalyani, her mother shattered to know about it. "Gopal's desertion is not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and

3. R.S. Pathak, "A Matter of Time : of Human Bonds and Bondages," *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by R.S. Pathak, New Delhi : Creative Books, 1998, p. 158.

a disgrace." (13) Pramod K. Nayar comments on their separation, "It is an interesting interior monologue follows Sumi's break up with Gopal. Sumi is anguished but cannot speak of her agony since it would trouble her mother Kalyani. Kalyani asks her : "Why do you want to be alone.?" Sumi thinks to herself: "It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I have to get used to being alone."⁴ Sumi is trying to endure the pains and humiliation 'wordlessly'. For family and friends, "There is an awkwardness about the whole thing and discomfort and uneasiness pervade more than grief and anger." (20) The reason for this is : "Sumi the person they come to comfort, is an enigma. She accepts Gopal's dumb sympathy, Devaki's fierce loyalty and Ramesh's stupefied bewilderment, as if they are all the same to her." (20) They don't find, "the right way to dealing with her apparent stoicism." (20) They are puzzled by her self control. Even her daughters are puzzled and intrigued and in a way, angered and hurt by her, 'stoicism'. They want to share the pain, loss and hurt which seems to be impossible with sumi. When Devi cries and tells Sumi, "may be I am crying because you don't . You don't even talk about it, "for the first time Sumi puts her pains in words, "I have never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don't know why and may be he doesn't really know, either? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused...? Let that be,

4. Pramod K. Nayar, *Textselfworld : Interior Monologue in A Matter of Time, Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi : Khosla Publishing House, 2001, p. 137.

we won't go into it now.' (107) We also notice that there is no obvious reasons for Gopal walking out on his family. This clearly established by the pathetic probing by Kalyani, Sumi's mother, who takes it upon her self to plead with her son-in-law to return home. But Sumi feels a sense of alienation. She feels hurt at the thought of her daughters blaming her for Gopal's action. "Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why can't I open my heart to them? " (23) Sumi, in fact, is trying to cope with the reality, trying to come to terms with the hard, painful reality, trying to come to terms with the hard, painful reality and wants her daughters to do the same. When her daughters are worried about his being dead or alive. "Sumi has no fears of his death, on the contrary, there is the certainty of his being alive of his steadily pursuing his own purposes. While the others are trying to find reasons for what he has done, she knows that the reason lies inside him, the reason is him." She also remembers the night she had gone to his room, knowing that only this way could she break out of her father's authority. But Gopal, to her consternation, had closed himself against her. "Go back Sumi,' he had said, almost coldly". (24) And yet Sumi has her own question to ask Gopal. Without blaming Gopal, she is curious to know, how he has taken the decision to disown things and people in this age of acquisition and possession: "if I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it Gopal... that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because ... it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live

in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on every thing in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this?" (27).

Gopal's desertion affects Sumi's body and soul. She tries hard to survive through it, but the change in her is visible : "With Gopal's going, it was as if the swift flowing stream of her being had grown thick and viscous — her movement, her thoughts, her very pulse and heartbeats seemed to have slowed down. It had worried her family, but it had been a necessary physical reaction to her emotional state, as if this slowing down was essential for survival." (28) Her world becomes meaningless now but she wants her daughters' life to be full of happiness. She herself says, "I want her to enjoy the good things in life, want her to taste life. I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter." (220).

Another important thing about Sumi is her ability to relate herself to the world. After Gopal's walking away she writes a play entitled "The Gardener's son" and proposes to write another. "It feels so good," she admits. "And now suddenly I want to do so many things" (231). She also wanted to rewrite the story of Surpanakha from an original point of view:

Female sexuality. We are ashamed of owning it, we can not speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she

flaunted them. And, therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it — it is this Surpanakha I'm going to write about.⁵

This above revision of the Surpanakha episode speaks of Sumi's ability and deep thought. It is a pity that Sumi dies of an accident suddenly, just before her taking up a job to support herself and her daughters.

Sumi's daughters, "Aru, Charu, Seema give the impression of having taken up the threads of their life." in the Big House. (23) Still Sumi is one who has the air of being lost, of having no place in her childhood home. (23) Gopal's leaving has created a vast void in her. In her own words, "his absence has left such a vast emptiness that I can not find my bearings, there are no makers anymore to show me which way I should go."

Aru, Sumi's elder daughter, is so upset and angry with her father that she wants Sumi to file a case against Gopal. Sumi disagrees and tells Aru, "I just want to get on with my life." (61) She puts an arm around Aru's shoulder : "Let him go, Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you." She also opposes Aru saying, "By punishing him do you

5. Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time* , New Delhi : Penguin Books, 1996, p. 191.

want to punish him. I don't . I am not interested. I just want to get on with my life." (61) With these words, she allows Gopal to have his own space, to implement on his own decisions, to free himself from the bondage of love as he needs this freedom. Y.S. Sumita Reddy aptly remarks that "Sumi's silence as, "Sumi copes quite admirably with the humiliation and disgrace of being a deserted wife. She does not save and rant but surrounds herself with a deathlike silence. Her very silence, however conveys her pains more effectively than words can."⁶ Reddy also adds that, " In a manner quite similar to that of her counterparts, Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmi, in Deshpande's earlier novels, Sumi reveals an independent nature. She refuses to accept financial help from her well placed parents, her doctor sister or Gopal's ever-helpful doctor nephew, Ramesh. She insists on taking up a temporary teaching post at once and is actively on the lookout for a permanent job. With great determination, she learns to ride a two wheelers, at her age, much to the amusement of her children and the anxiety of her mother, she frantically searches for a house to move into, unwilling to stay on in her parents' house, but given up only when she is convinced of the impracticality of moving out of the 'Big House' which has ample space for her family into an expensive and congested apartment. She gently spurs the efforts made by her friend and cousins, Devaki. She also makes it a point to inform Gopal that she

6. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "Marriage is not for Everyone": A Matter of Time, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, op. cit., p. 111.

has in no way encouraged their daughter, Aru, who is obsessed with the idea of suing her father for maintenance. Her pride refuses to allow her to show her grief to Gopal or request him to return home."⁷

As the novel proceeds we read that Sumi understands her young daughter's desperate need of the warmth and togetherness of family and yet she sets Gopal free without any complaint speaks volumes of her courage and understanding. Earlier Aru - the heroine of the novel became rebellious. The "desire to rebel" is deeply ingrained in her."⁽¹¹⁾ Her reaction to her mother's stoic acceptance of it is "violent and sharp" (21). Aru's "hostility" is like "a weapon" of "an adversary" (49). She is no longer interested in Gopal's answer, but she will not let him "get away scott-free" (137). She is painted by the disintegration of the family, but her self respect would not let her stoop to self-pity. In this way Sumi succeeds in motivating her daughter's mind in developing a good thinking about Gopal. In the words of Suvarna Shinde, "This understanding between Gopal and Sumi makes their relationship a unique one in Deshpande's fictional world. All the man woman relationships in her novels are oppressive, strange, uncomfortable or silence. Sumi and Gopal stand out uniquely in spite of the fact that Gopal leaves them for something unattainable."⁸

⁷. Ibid, p. 115.

⁸. Suvarna Shinde, "Quest for Freedom : A Study of Deshpande's A Matter of Time," *Women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande*, edited by Suman Bala, New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House, 2001, p. 132.

Right from her childhood Sumi has been "Beautiful graceful, effortlessly, almost without wanting to gather friends around her." (104) When she meets Gopal, for the first time after their separation, there are no tears, no abuses, no questions or explanations. When Sumi enters his room, Gopal is having his lunch and reading a book of poems. Asking Sumi to wait, he goes out to wash his hands. When she is looking out of the window into the courtyard, "She hears his voice. He is responding to someone, perhaps a servant woman, offering to wash up for him. The children call out to him and she hears him laugh. And, as if his voice knits everything together, she can suddenly see the substance, the reality of his life apart from her and their children. All these lives, contiguous to his, spell out the actuality of their separation." (84-85). She says to him that, it occurs to her with its finality that "We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his wife has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately." (85).

This 'reality' dawns upon her without even any exchange of words. And Sumi understands and accepts it. Shashi Deshpande comments: "Sumi's acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself. She is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity, she would

do anything for pride. She distances even her husband. The point is they are both unusual."⁹

The novel also tells the story of Kalyani. A thirty old years of silence in marriage of Kalyani and Shripati, Sumi's parents, is at the centre of this novel. Kalyani was an intelligent girl and was often playful told by her father that she would become the country's first engineer. She was, however, not allowed to even complete her schooling and instead was married off to her maternal uncle, Shripati, according to her mother's wishes. Kalyani's mother, Manorama, is obsessed with the fear of her husband taking up another wife as she could not produce a male heir to their property and she does not even relish the idea of Kalyani marrying into a new family, as the property would then belong to them. Hence her desire that her only child, Kalyani, should marry her brother, Shripati. As time passes of Kalyani and Shripati three children borned. The last one, who is a boy, Madhav is mentally retarded.

The tragedy strikes Kalyani when her four-year-old son gets lost at a railway platform as she is waiting to board the train to Bangalore. Shripati can not forgive his wife for her negligence and sends her back to her parents's house with her two remaining children, Sumi and Premi. It is only on her death bed that Manorama is able to prevail

⁹ Vimala Rama Rao, *In Conversaton with Shashi Deshpande*, in R.S. Pathak, the *Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, creative Books, New Delhi : 1998, p 258

upon her brother to return and live in the 'Big House' with his wife and daughters. He obliges her but continues to maintain a story silence with his wife. The enormous cruelty of it, apparently, does not cause as much concern as it would have, if, perhaps, Shripati had forsaken his wife or she had died. On hearing her grandparents' story, Aru, is shocked at her grandmother's acceptance of such a life : "And when Kalyani signs her name, carefully spelling out "Kalyani bai Pandit," Aru is amazed. How can she still have his name for god's sake?" (146) At times Sumi too wonders : "But for many others this way will be a sound arrangement where husband and wife are living together under the same roof even if there is only silence between them. "Sumi recalls Shankar's mother's words "what is a woman without a husband?" (167) Sumi is unable to comprehend the meaning of such an existence. She thinks:

"It is enough to have a husband and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of a man's love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breast? Kalyani lost all this (had she ever had them?) But her *Kumkum* is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife.¹⁰

¹⁰. Shshi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time*, Op. cit. p. 167.

Later Kalyani is keen on getting a good match for her grand daughter Aru, though they are "amazed" by her unusual interest in marriage, which was responsible for her own misfortunes: "How can she of all people, think of marriage with enthusiasm?" (124).

Aru, the eldest daughter of Sumi and Gopal is very disturb by the 'queer' relationship between her grandparents, not only accepts them but relates herself to Kalyani and her past. As Sumi understands at a later stage: "We have a very complex relationship with the past. Whether we are resisting it, reliving it, ignoring it, or trying to recreate it all these things often at the same time — We are always, in some way, trying to reshape it to our desires." (100) And "The truth perhaps, is that whatever we do, we are always giving the past a place in our lives." (100) She is endowed with an "innate sense of order" (12) Since the beginning of her life she has been a creative and an intelligent daughter. In the novel Aru is surprised to learn from lawyer/activist friend Surekha about the totally unfair system which had been in force in our country since time immemorial until recently. Aru, who plans to sue her father for maintaince, comes to Surekha for help. Surekha then tells : "You are lucky to be living now. Do you know that Manu doesn't mention any duty to maintains a daughter? The duty is towards a wife, parents and sons." (204). At the final stage of the novel Aru succeeds in motivating her father's mood silently. Gopal himself expresses his emotions as a father:

But I glimpsed it even then, the truth that would soon confront me, I saw it when Sumi put the baby to her breast. For I knew, when I looked at them, that they belonged together as I never did. Even when Sumi was impatient, when she showed a flash of temper as she often did for being deprived of her sleep, they were together in that magic circle. Woman and child. And I was outside, A man is always an outsider.

I envied Sumi for this. And for this too: for a woman, from the moment she is pregnant, there is an overriding reason for living, a justification for life that is loudly and emphatically true. A man has to search for it, always and forever.¹¹

The same feelings are reinforced by Gopal in response to Shankar who expresses his inability to protect his wife from his mother's sharp tongue saying, "She gave me birth, she brought me up, she looked after me", (216) Gopal understnads his dilemma and observes :

That is a debt we can never repay, it is a burden we can never lay down. Women will never understand this, they don't need to, they are luckier : the day they become mothers themselves, they have repaid their debt, they are unburdened and free. What is fatherhood set against this weight, this certainty of motherhood?¹²

¹¹. Ibid, p. 68.

¹². Ibid, p. 126.

Jasbir Jain comments that "in '*A Matter of Time*', the author subtly debates the whole issue of individual freedom. The novel has three parts — The House, The Family, The River — and each title carries within it a meaning. 'The House' is the body, it is also memory and lineage, the coming together of all different elements.... 'The Family' consists of three generations.... The Third part, 'The River' is about immersion in the river waters clean and purify. It is also about the stream of life which flows."¹³ Further, she says, Deshpande's "novels are not about woman but social institutions and the nature of freedom.... Freedom, when it comes, brings with it its own burden. Gopal is aware that Sumi by not bringing in any legal action against him is giving him his freedom while at the same time learning to build a sense of freedom for herself."¹⁴ (40-41).

The novel ends on a tragic note with the sudden deaths of Sumi and her father, Shripati, in a road accident,. The whole story presents three generations of Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. Gopal, belonging to male community, is for the first time described as a round male character by Deshpande. N. Poovalingam aptly remarks that, "One feels that, after all, Shashi Deshpande has succeeded in creating a male character which stands by itself and not as a prop to uphold the female protagonist."¹⁵

¹³. Jasbir Jain, "*Positioning the 'Post' in Post-Feminism : Reworking of strategies*", *Critical Practice*, Vol. VII, No. 2, June 2000, p. 40.

¹⁴. N. Poovalingam, "Beyond the Strangehold of Women," *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* edited by R.S. Pathak, New Delhi : Creative book, 1998, p 175.

¹⁵. Ibid, pp. 40-41.

Thus, although *A Matter of Time* has a male protagonist, Deshpande's focus remains on female characters. Three women characters Kalyani, Sumi and Aru — however emerge in the novel that attract our attention. The images of Kalyani and Sumi are those of silent, suffering but non-submissive women. However, the image of Aru belonging to the third generation is different. She is a persuasive girl who is keen only to bring about a reconciliation between her parents. As in her earlier novels, Deshpande in *A Matter of Time* as well does not deviated from her commitment to display her concern for silent suffering married women in our contemporary Indian society.

Small Remedies

Small Remedies (2000), is the latest novel of Shashi Deshpande. In this novel, Deshpande seems to be at her best. In this novel her protagonist is an urban, educated middle-aged woman. Y.S. Sunita Reddy aptly remarks that, "her protagonist is still the urban, middle-aged and educated woman, but her canvas has broadened to encompass a cross section of people who belong to different communities, professions and levels of society. Madhu Saptarishi is not much different from her counterparts Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi in age, education and family background."¹ Reddy also says that, "All of them in some measure or the other face upheavals in their marriages — upheavals which are inevitable when a woman refuses to conform to her accepted role as wife, mother or sister. But moving away from her near perfect portrayal of a traditional Kanadiga-Maharashtrain Brahmin family, Deshpande ventures to write about a Goan Christian family and also mentions a Muslim *Tabla* player and briefly touches upon his life and the people surrounding him, notably his grand daughter, Hasina."² In a review Soumya Bhattacharya

¹. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "Fractured Memories" : *Small Remedies, A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi : Prestige Books, 2001, p. 123.

². Loc. Cit.

remarks that "It is essentially a book about a void about blankness, but it shows how human beings learn to live with it, accept it and sometime grope for and grapple with means to fill that emptiness."³

The novel opens with Madhu, the narrator of the tale, travels to small town Bhavanipur from big-time Mumbai to write the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, doyen of the Gwalior gharana. She arrives in the wake of her adolescent son Aditya's death carrying with her the bleeding wound of that loss. In a sense, she is escaping, trying to get away (a recurring motif in Deshpande's oeuvre) to piece together her shattered life, "moving through the rubble of (our) devastated lives, searching for something, for any bits and pieces of (our) past."

This search leads her to Bhavanipur and Savitribai— whose daughter was once Madhu's childhood friend — and to a young couple who open its home to her. This couple, Lata and Hari, as well as Savitribai and her student Hasina, become the counterpoint to the past that Madhu tries to escape.

In a review, Meenakshi Mukherjee briefly sums up Deshpande's works and observes the noticeable change: "In *Small Remedies*, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels - all five of them different from each other - but smaller than this in

³. Soumya Bhattacharya, "*Death Shall Have No Dominion*", *The Hindustan Times*, 14th May 2000.

scope.... But none of them gathered up as this new novel does, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our composite culture where an Anthony Gonsalves (the reference to "Amar Akbar Anthony" is deliberate), a Hamidabai and Joe can all be part of Madhu's extended family, and the daughter of Ghulam Saab can opt, though not very easily to get accepted as Shailja Joshi."⁴

Madhu, the narrator of the tale is writing the biography of a famous classical singer, Savitribai, Indorekar, doyen of the Gwalior Gharana. She plays with classical music, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes: "Of the four remarkable novels I have read in recent times that deal with music — Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*, Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Bani Babu's Bangla Novel *Gandharvi* and now *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande, I think faces the toughest challenge. This has to do with incompatibility between the discourse of Hindustani Music and the English language."⁵

In her biography Madhu writes, Savitribai as a small-sized woman. Physically she appears to be a frail woman. Looking back, Madhu remembers her as:

⁴. Meenakshi Mukherjee, "On her own terms", *The Hindu*, 7th May 2000,

⁵. Loc cit.

Savitribai as a small sized woman. Even from my child's perspective she had seemed petite. Age and illness have so shrunk her that she's a doll-sized woman now. She was also in my eyes, a very beautiful woman, but my standards had not been very high.Savitribai with her fair complexion, her gold-bordered sarees and pearls had stood out among the tired, shabby women I saw around me. Now I realize that she must indeed have been very attractive.⁶

She is, however, imperious in her attitude to her servants students, and even her biographer, often giving her instructions on how to conduct the interview. She has very good knowledge in the field of classical music. Madhu observes the unspoken resentment in Bai's voice when she recalls how she was abruptly asked by her grandmother to stop singing when she was performing as a child during a family gathering. Madhu herself recollects how. "In Neemgaon she was 'the singer woman' and there was something derogatory about the words, yes, I can see that now, about the way they said them." (29) She also finds out, 'To my father, she was 'Savitraibai! But when he said the name, when he spoke of her, there was respect and admiration in his voice. To Babu, she was 'that bai', by which he meant 'that woman'

⁶. Shashi Deshpande, *Small Remedies*, New Delhi : Viking, Penguin, India, 2000, P. 14.

— the words accompanied by a movement of the head which said 'the woman next door', as well as indicated a kind of rude contempt for her." (29) But to Madhu she is Muni's mother. Madhu refuses to ponder to the publisher's wishes to write a trendy feminist biography. They feel that "Victim stories are out of fashion, heroines are in. Heroinism — a word which falls oddly on my unaccustomed ears, a word devoid now of its earlier attributes of passivity and beauty is the word of the day." (167) She records the life of a young woman who had lived a sheltered life of a daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahmin family. She feels that for a woman with such a background to elope with a Muslims *tabla* player and live in a strange town among total strangers must have required immense courage.

That there are different yardsticks for men and women in our society is obvious to Madhu who, in her childhood, was a witness to the rejection of Savitribai by a conventional society. She remembers how in Neemgaon "each family had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background etc. (138).

Madhu is aware that her father with his unorthodox ways was an oddity. Being a widower and bringing up a daughter on his own with only a male servant at home, observing no rituals or religious customs and openly indulging in a drink or two every evening, he obviously stood out in a conservative place like Neemgaon. But, looking back, Madhu realizes that while people were willing to over

look her father's eccentricities and his foibles they were not so generous when it came to accepting Savitribai. He was a popular and trusted doctor. "Being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without open censure or disapproval." (139) It is only when a woman dares to defy conventions that people are shocked. As Madhu observes, "In a sense, neither of us belonged. Muni's family, with her singer mother, absent father and another man - a muslim - sharing the home, was of course radically, shockingly different." (138)

Madhu also gives the example of Savitribai's father-in-law, who had a mistress, a singer famous for her Thumri singing. It was common knowledge that he visited her regularly. The women looked on in amusement and gossiped about it. They wondered at his choice of a mistress but there was never any outrage over the fact. "That he had a mistress was accepted, a wife from one's own class, a mistress from another - this was normal." (220)

For a man to indulge in his love of music and even to have a singer for a mistress was alright. But, for a daughter-in-law to be learning music seriously, as if she was going to be a professional, was scandalous and unmistakable. Though Bai and the support and encouragement of her father-in-law, Madhu could imagine the anger, contempt and ridicule she had to face from the other women when she returned to her life among the women, after her music classes. She

could imagine the jibes and the hostility and the way she would have been cast aside like an untouchable. She says:

To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to conform, to float the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animals know this, they do it more openly, their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds. There is always the temptation to succumb, to go back to the normal path and be accepted, To resist the temptation speaks of great courage.⁷

Madhu also remembers the gossip surrounding Bai in Neemgaon. There was a Station Director who frequented Bai's house and got her many contracts with the radio and was generally believed to be her lover. Madhu remembers the children teasing Munni and calling him her *mama*, a kind of euphemism for a mother's lover. Bai denies the existence of any lover, while recounting her story to Madhu. But to the town, in Madhu's childhood, it was very simple - why would a man go out of his way to do so many favours for a woman, only would he visit her so often? All such assumptions ending finally in the conclusion: "A woman who had left her husband's home — What moral would she have, anyway!"(222).

7. Ibid, pp. 220-221.

Madhu is left quite confused at times about Bai's courage or lack of it. She had, undoubtedly, led the most unconventional life anyone in her society would ever imagine. But behind these acts of bravado was a woman who wanted to conform, to be accepted by society. Savitribai was not the stereotypical feminist with a devil-may-care attitude. This is evident in her blanking out Ghulam Saab's name while relating a story of her life to Madhu, her biographer. This reveals her anxiety to cover up her youthful indiscretion in order to present a picture of respectability. She even goes to the extent of hiding the details of her daughter born through her association with Ghulam Saab. Madhu who is aware of Savitribai's past and her daughter Munni, is unable to digest her indifference to her daughter, more so, because Madhu herself is a doting mother, grieving over the death of her son.

Madhu feels that she can give Bai the immortality she desires only if she is willing to pay the price of revealing her daughter to the world — a daughter whose existence she had successfully obliterated until then. She cannot understand why, when she had the courage to walk out on her marriage and family, she was so frightened to reveal the existence of her child. She wonders how "She gave that child the name 'Indorekar' — the name she adopted as a singer (from her mother's home town Indore) — not compromising either her maiden name or her married one. Meenakshi Indorekar. Marking her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage, not the child of her lover. This surely is a statement I cannot ignore" (169)

Munni, however, desperately hankered after the name her mother had left behind and went to great lengths to dissociate herself from her father and, after a while, her mother, Bai had found conventional life stultifying, but Munni yearned for it all her life. "But Munni hankered for the name her mother had left behind, she yearned for the conventional life Bai had found so stultifying".(169) As a child Madhu recollected how Munni refused to accept Ghulam Saab as her father and instead concocted stories about a lawyer father who lived in Pune. She also remembered how the girls in their neighbourhood tormented her with questions:

What is your name?

What is your father's name?

Where is your father?

Who is the man who lives with your mother?⁸

Years later when Madhu met Munni in a bus and recognised her, she later refused to answer to the name of 'Munni' or even acknowledge her childhood friend. She declared that her name was 'Shailaja Joshi', trying as it were, to desperately wipe out any connection with her past.

⁸. Ibid, p. 77.

Apart from Savitribai, Madhu's narrative also includes another character or perhaps more remarkable woman, her aunt Leela who was "ahead not only of her generation, but the next one as well." (94) She was a fiercely independent woman and was strongly committed to the communist ideology. She had participated in the Quit India Movement, but was critical of Gandhiji's principles of *Ahimsa and Satyagraha* and thought that it was ridiculous to allow oneself to be beaten up. As she grew older, however, she mellowed down and regretted some of her actions. It was evident that she was no run-of-the-mill activist, but a woman who had the courage of her convictions. She resigned from her party when she felt that the party's reaction to a political situation was not appropriate.

Though Leela was a generation older than Madhu, she was financially independent and supported herself. When her first husband, Vasanth, died she took up a job and educated her brothers-in-law. She lived in the crowded chawls among the cotton mills and worked for the welfare of the women, afflicted with T.B. It was this which first brought her into contact with her second husband, Joe, a doctor who had established a clinic especially for T.B. patients.

Leela and Joe were poles apart and Madhu exclaims at the strangeness of Joe falling madly in love with her. He was a widower with two children, spoke impeccable English and was very widely read, quoting from his favourite writers at the drop of a hat. Literature

and music were the two great forces of his life, in addition to medicine. Leela, on the other hand, were 'ayahsaries', according to Phillo, Joe's housekeeper. She spoke no English and knew nothing of literature or music. She had no sense of humour, according to Joe. But their was a wonderful companionship and a beautiful relationship, according to Madhu.

Leela was a person who disapproved of a life that did not look beyond one's own self. Madhu recollects her reaction to the film 'Devdas', when she said, "why that dreary weepy film?" Tony had groaned, but for a girl my age, an anguished tragic Dilip Kumar was irresistible."(95) When Leela remained silent for a long time after watching the film, Madhu thought that the film had evoked memories of her dead husband, who like the hero of the film had died of T.B. But what Leela had to say surprised and amused Madhu, Joe, and Tony: "Now I know," She said, as if she had solved a puzzle. "Now I know why that poor man drank so much. He had nothing to do, he didn't have any work at all. I am serious, what are you all laughing at; she asked us severely, unable to understand our amusement — only Leela could have made this statement! 'If an intelligent man like him remains idle, what else can he do but take to drink?" (96)

Leela disliked the superior status her family gave itself and wondered what made them so special. She did not find anything even remotely worthy in their holding on to the lands which they had

inherited. She did not believe in the caste system and was the only one among Madhu's relatives, who accepted Madhu's parents' marriage and invited them to stay with her when they had no place of their own.

Leela was a passionate believer in the communist ideology but did not hesitate to speak up against the party when the need arose. After putting in years of hard work, she was sidelined by the party bosses and never reached the top of the hierarchy, while men who worked under her reached there easily enough. Once a widow of a sitting member, who was killed, was given a ticket to stand for elections. This provoked Leela, who had never earlier complained, to comment, "It seems you've got to become a widow for them to remember that you exist. " (224) This is, indeed, a telling statement on the chauvinism that rules all political parties.

Savitribai too understood how much more difficult it was for women to rise to the top when compared to men. Madhu wondered if she had ever heard the phrase gender discrimination (224) but she had certainly experienced and accepted it as the normal course of things. Madhu remembers how she had once commented caustically speaking of a young instrumentalist who had reached the pinnacle in no time : "Nowadays they become *Ustads and Pandits* even before they have proper moustaches'.

At the final stage of the novel we notice that Madhu the narrator of the story is in the foreground of the novel. She is

commissioned to write the biography of Savitribai. She has always been intrigued, even as a child by Bai's relationship with Ghulam Saab and Munni, their daughter. The novel covers that period of her life when she is grieving over the death of her only child Aditya. In remembering and retelling the stories of Leela, Savitribai and Munni, she presents the glaring inequalities in gender in society. The pity of it is that some of the victims are not even aware of the injustices heaped on them. Madhu herself is a victim of sorts of which the reader is aware only towards the end of the novel. She had been brought up as a child by two men- her father and Babu, a male servant, but she had no complaints. On the other hand, she felt pity for the children who seemed to be constantly harassed by their mothers. She says:

Motherless child that I am, motherhood is an unknown world to me. The mothers I see in my childhood are drab creatures, forever working, forever scoldig their children, certainly they are not the women to arouse a sense of deprivation in me.⁹

Madhu also says about motherhood that she could not find;
Madhu says:

I get some images of motherhood in the movies I see
myself through the songs that speak of 'ma ka pyar'. But

⁹. Ibid: p. 182.

real life shows me something entirely different. Munni's mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her sons; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating. Som's mother so demanding — none of them conform to the white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the movies.¹⁰

But Madhu herself, turned out to be a doting mother and ever perceptive of her son's every need. Therefore it was all the more tragic when Aditya, her son, died in a bomb blast.

Madhu's estrangement with her husband, Som, began earlier than this tragedy, when Madhu, waking up after a nightmare, one night, revealed to him a secret which she had locked up in the innermost recesses of her mind. She had slept with a man when she was only fifteen, a man who later committed suicide. Som is unable to accept this of his wife. As one who had been a good husband by any standards and shared a wonderful relationship with his wife. He is now unable to come to terms with this news. He is totally devastated. Madhu is unable to comprehend this:

But it is the single act of sex that Som holds on to, its this fact that he can not let go of, as if it has been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen - these are

¹⁰. Ibid.. p. 183.

the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter.¹¹

Madhu thinks about her nightmare. She feels that some one is saying 'Madhu' Madhu, wake-up, wake-up, what is it...? She says about nightmare to Som—

There was this sack, a gunny sack , its mouth fastened with jute string, like a bag of grains. I opened the sack, it took me some time, but I untied the knot and opened it. And there was a face looking at me, a man's face, his mouth open, tongue hanging out, weals round the neck. Marks of a rope. And even as I started in horror at the face, the face came alive, the eyes opened, they looked at me, they saw me...¹²

After a lot of fear she comes out of it when she feels, "He killed himself, because of me. He hanged himself because of me." (261) She also adds, "He slept with me, I was only fifteen then. He — I don't think he meant it, but it happened. And that is why he — that is why he died. He killed himself because of what he did to me." (262).

It does not matter that Som himself had a full-fledged relationship with another woman before his marriage. As I think, "It is

¹¹. Ibid : p. 262.

¹². Ibid: p. 261.

a typical situation where a man may have any number of affairs but expects his wife to be a virgin. It is all the more undigestible to Som that his wife had been a willing partner. Madhu thinks "that he could, perhaps, have borne: that I had been raped, forced into the act, that I was a victim, not a participant." (260)

Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour. Madhu observed how Hari and Lata looked at her when she returned after inadvertently spending a night in a hotel room with Chandru. She thinks:

It does not matter that Chandru is Som's friend and Chandru and I had been friends as well for nearly 25 years. I remember the writer's look last night, when he brought us our dinner, the gleam in his eyes when they rested on me. Men and women can never be friends. Men can be brothers, fathers, lovers, husbands, but never friends — is that how it is? ¹³

The novel ends with the death of Savitribai whose death was not an ordinary one but very heartaching. At the time of death "Bai has gone into a coma. She has been cheated of the 'beg one'. Which, it now seems, will no longer come to her. She is crawling to her death." (321)

¹³. Ibid: p. 254.

Lying in bed and waiting for the day to break she says, "This is my last day in Bhavanipur. I remember my first morning here when I woke up in a strange house to the thought of living with two absolute strangers. I think of the voices I heard that morning, voices raised in a choric harmony that woke me out of my uneasy troubled sleep. I never heard them again." (321).

In this novel Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly expressed her displeasure at being considered the champion of oppressed women. It is indeed, a tribute to her that some of the reviewers recognize her for what she is. Malati Mathur writes : ;"In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rabid diatribes, She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy." ¹⁴

Thus, in this novel Madhu projects the image of a rebellious woman — the woman who rebels against the norms and traditions of the society in a silent and subtle manner, trying to search for her own identity. Madhu's image as a woman is quite outstanding as she endeavours to time on quietly the kind of the life, she wants to live, silently and boldly transgressing the norms of the society. Thus, Madhu projects the image of woman subtly different from those of Deshpande's other protagonist.

¹⁴. Malati Mathur, "Rebels in the Household" *India today*, April, 3, 2000.

Summing - Up

A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal her enormous sympathy for women and their sorrows and sufferings, trials and travails, plights and predicaments, prompting her critics and reviewers to run away with the impression that she has joined the band of feminist writers who have achieved much popularity in the West. She refuses to be called a feminist writer. She has a remarkable insight into the working of a woman's mind. As a writer, she highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. Deshpande gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present day woman who is educated, intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism.

Deshpande's women are products of a painful period of transition in society where they have a greater share of responsibilities than their predecessors. They also have a number of avenues open before them and in many fields, they have also proved themselves better than their male counterparts. In spite of their remarkable achievements, the general attitude towards women has not changed correspondingly. In the institution of marriage, the age-old rules with regard to the accepted behaviour of husband and wife remains almost unchanged, despite an overt display of Western influence.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's search for identity— an exploration into the feminine psyche. Her protagonists undergo an arduous journey to discover themselves and this leads them through a maze of self-doubts and fears. In her novels, she describes woman in different roles - as a wife, as a mother, as a grandmother, as a beloved or as an individual— in her own right. Deshpande's handling of the images of women in her various novels is unique and very remarkable.

Her maiden novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is a typical example of a husband's inability to come to terms with his wife's superior social and economic status. In this novel Deshpande gives a vivid portrayal of a woman who falls a prey to her husband's frustratoinns when he realizes that she has more successful than him professionally. The novel also traces the traumatic childhood of Saru who is the victim of gender bias at the hands of an insensitive mother. It is Deshpande's totally different work in the domain of Indian English fiction in the sense that it explodes the myth of man's arrogant superiority and the myth of woman's being a silent sacrificial goat or an unquestioning paragon of all virtues. The image of Saru in this novel is that of a suffering but protesting wife who endeavours in her own way to revolt against her sadistic husband. But ultimately she had to return to the same husband because of the overpowering traditonal forces prevailing at her father's place and in the society.

In addition to full length novels, Deshpande has also written detective serials which have been expanded and published as novels. They are *If I Die Today* and *Come Up and Be Dead*.

The narrator Manju in *If I Die Today*, is quite different from the average Indian woman who views matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in life. She resents the fact that her children are a barrier to her independence. Motherhood, she thinks, "is a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word 'freedom' means. It is obvious also that she does not approve of her daughter displaying any typically female characteristics like fear or cowardice. She thinks : 'I did not want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent.'" (45) In this novel Deshpande also tries to unmask the outwardly sophisticated and well-educated person's yearning for a son and heir. Finally, Deshpande lays bare the feeble male ego which cannot tolerate the idea of female superiority. In the novel, Tony sums up the main ingredient for a happy marriage. He is happy so long as his wife looks up to him but when she starts earning more than he does, he begins to think that she is patronising him.

Although the image of Manju in *If I Die Today* appears to be quite close to that of Saru in the preceding novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the image of Manju is in fact quite different from that of Manju. Unlike, Saru, Manju in *If I Die Today* proves to be much

stronger and more resentful for she, unlike Saru does not return to her husband and children as her submissive return will deprive her of her individuality and autonomy.

The next detective novel of Deshpande is *Come Up and Be Dead*, where also the novelist is at her best at is the portrayal of human relationships and the turmoils raging in the minds of her female protagonists who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands and society in general. The chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school principal, Kshama, and her housekeeper Cousin, Devayani are spinsters. They are typical exaples, of women caught between the modern idea of freedom and the traditional need for a husband and home of their own. Kshama is an efficient administrator and possesses an ostensibly unruffled manner but her thoughts reveal agitation and complexes within her. Devayani seems quite content with her role as a housekeeper but we find her musing now and then about the uselessness of her life. This may be Devayani's way of showing that even a person as well - read as Devayani who quotes frequently from Shakespeare and Dickens, is still the product of a culture which declares woman's experience as incomplete without marriage. Through the image of Jyoti Raman, a school teacher, Deshpande also hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. Mrs. Raman is somehow able to free herself from her husband by threatening to commit suicide but there

are many others who are not so lucky. Thus, this novel focuses on the images of young college girls who are treated as sex objects and supplied as call-girls.

Shashi Deshpande successfully presents the inequalities and injustice heaped on woman because of her subordinate status. In *Roots and Shadows*, through the image of Indu, the protagonist, we are made aware of the plight of various women like her Kakis and Atyas. The heart rending account of Akka's child marriage reveals the appalling condition of women barely a couple of generations ago. The inferior position of a wife in any marriage is made obvious through glimpses into the marriages of Indu's numerous aunts and uncles. It is clear that Indu, who is proud of her liberated outlook, falls a prey to age-old tradition and unreasonable convention. Deshpande also exposes the sham and hypocrisy prevalent in the so-called urban, educated men like Jayant who are ostensibly influenced by the West and who pretend to possess progressive ideas, but are, in reality, as chauvinistic and filtered to time-worn conventions as their less educated and exposed counterparts. He belongs to a society, which prides itself on its sophistication and refinement, but at home he remains a conventional husband expecting his wife to play a very submissive role.

However, the image of Indu emerges in *Roots and Shadows* as that of a powerful liberated woman who not only smashes the age-old

traditions of the society but also moves beyond the bounds of matrimony indulging even in a post-marital affair to seek fulfilment pursuant to her liberated outlook on life. Also, the image of Padmini, a minor figure in the novel, belongs to the same category.

In her Sahitya Akademi Award - winning novel, *That Long Silence*, Deshpande, presents Jaya's husband Mohan, who is a typical Indian husband. He takes his wife's support for his family expense. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects his wife to follow him into hiding without a murmur of protest. He does not mind using his wife as a crutch in his hour of crisis and the slightest hint of deviation from her role of a subservient wife is enough to provoke a terrifying outburst with which he walks out of the home. Deshpande also shows how Jaya herself is to be blamed for the state of her marriage. In retrospect, Jaya realizes how she had all along followed her Vanita Mami's advice that a husband is like a 'sheltering tree' which must be kept alive at any cost because without the tree the wife becomes dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. Jaya thinks that she has to keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. Thus a different pattern of the image of woman surfaces in the novel. The image of Jaya as a rebellious wife with a liberated outlook who later on submits to her husband showing her capacity for tolerance is quite different but fascinating, exposing the helplessness and incapacity of myriad married women in

contemporary Indian Society.

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande makes a bold attempt to tackle the subject of marital rape. Through the image of Mira, she focuses attention on all those women who are doomed to silently suffer nightly assaults by their husband because the very idea of a woman protesting against her husband's sexual advances is unheard of in our society, Deshpande also hints at the lack of compatibility in Urmi's marriage even though hers is a love marriage. Through the image of Sakutai, Deshpande shows how at the lower level of society, marital vows are flouted most casually by men like Sakutai's husband. He is a good-for-nothing drunkard who leaves his wife and three children to find for themselves and hankers after another woman, raping even the sister of his wife.

In Deshpande's seventh novel, *A Matter of Time*, the theme of alienation is pronounced. The author quotes extensively from the *Upanishads*, to explain the sense of rootlessness and desolation experienced by the protagonist Gopal, who abandons his wife and three teenaged daughters for some strange and inexplicable reason. The author also describes the pain and humiliation of Sumi, his wife, who copes with the situation admirably and tries to provide emotional and financial security to her three daughters.

The images of women, as depicted in *The Binding Vine* and *A*

Matter of Time are those of very many married Indian women who silently suffer the terrible agony and anguish in their married lives which make a sad commentary on the millions of married Indian women who lack basic brass to go beyond the bounds of matrimony to live independently on their own terms.

Deshpande's latest novel, *Small Remedies* is "a book about writing a book" with reflections on the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life. It examines, in retrieving memory, the complexities in encapsulating the life of Savitribai Indorekar, who is devoted to music. Running through the narrative of this remarkable woman is the saga of Leela, who defies conventional norms and remarries after her widowhood. It is through Madhu's image that we get to know the dark corners of Bai's life and the illuminating saga of Leela. In portraying the images of these women struggling for identity, Deshpande uncovers the ache and agony of Indian women with a different pattern.

Finally, we notice that a close study of Deshpande's fiction reveals that she is a highly sensitive writer who is clearly aware of the male-female imbalance in Indian society. Her male characters conform to the standard feminist description of a middle class husband who is insensitive, egoistic and sometimes over-ambitious. But, at the same time, most of her women characters too suffer from some weaknesses or other so much so that it becomes difficult to level her work. Thus,

Shashi Deshpande is basically interested in the issues, not just pertaining to women, but to all humanity.

Through numerous interesting images of women creating various fascinating mosaic patterns in her novels, she artistically dwells upon several glaring and grave problems confronting women at large which not only corrode the societal structure but also eat into the vitals of the institution of matrimony threatening to devastate the pure premordial man-woman relationship, zeroing in on her profound concern for the ultimate "human issues" which are of tremendous global interest to entire humanity. Shashi Deshpande, therefore, can rightly be regarded as a great humanist-novelist rather than a mere womanist or feminist-novelist. Thus, the image of woman, which does play a very vital role in the shaping of her novels, indubitably integral to our unbiased critical understanding of the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

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